

Harry Potter and the Order of the Light and Dark

Chapter – 1

Harry had just lost Sirius in the Department of Mysteries and had learnt about the Prophecy from Dumbledore. School would close in about two weeks time in which Harry would have to finish grieving, after that the holidays and with them the Dursleys would arrive jeering and mocking him. Ron and Hermione were in the infirmary along with Ginny, Neville and Luna. Only he had been declared fit by Madam Pomfrey, the others were still recovering.

Neville and Luna would be discharged the day after, while Ron, Hermione and Ginny would stay till the School nurse who ruled the infirmary with a fist of iron saw it fit to allow them to leave. Harry sighed bitterly as he walked along the deserted corridors of the School that had become his home for the last five years. Classes had been cancelled after the OWLS and many students had left for their homes early in the light of Voldemort being alive and kicking and terrorizing.

He had no affection shown to him as a child and his daily question and prayer at night had been why he had been left alive by God when his parents' should die. It was because of that he had to stay in a broom closet and work like the slaves of old. His thirst for knowledge had been squashed by the Dursleys and his better performances had resulted in subtle threats and after that Harry had been forced to make sure he never performed better than his cousin.

Over the years the passion to know and learn had been dulled to such an extent he was only an average student instead of the eager student who had been filled with an excitement and an eagerness to learn new things when he first went to Muggle School.

He never knew what it was to be respected as person in his own right and his sense of confidence and self – respect had taken such a trashing that he never dared to venture in to the land of the extrovert,

never giving his opinions unless he was asked specifically and even then he was careful and never making contradictory statements if he could avoid them.

When he entered the Wizarding World he had been pushed up and down the social and political ladder till he did not know where he was at any given moment. Nevertheless he had been very happy at first as he had thought he was being recognized as a person in his own right. Well what a disappointment he was in for.

His aunt and uncle had renamed him as the freak, calling him Harry would mean giving him too much respect. The Wizarding World had also done the same. They called him the Boy-who-Lived, when he was up the ladder and mental and mad and an attention seeking idiot when he was down the ladder. This was worse in Harry's opinion in some ways as with the Dursleys at least there were constants.

They always told him they hated him and did not want him; he was unworthy of love and respect, two things that defined the standard of living to Harry. A good life meant to him to be accepted as a person in his own right and be respected. Two things he had never known in his life. Here in the Wizarding World he was thrown head first into situations not of his making and was forced to deal with them.

When Sirius had stormed into his life he had given Harry the courage to hope, the dare to feel wanted as a person and not as the vanquisher of Voldemort or the Boy-who-Lived whose only aim in life was to adhere to the public's whims and fancies and then fade away obediently.

Now, Harry thought tears threatening to pour down his cheeks, once again after his parents' deaths when he had lived an unworthy and unloved life all these years, he had made sure that there would be no one to love him and no one for him to love. What made it bitterer was the fact he was responsible for the death of the only person who saw the Harry in the freak and the Boy-who-Lived.

Why oh why did he not have the sense to see the package Sirius had give? Why did he trust an elf that had always showed it was not trustworthy? Harry clutched his head in his hands as he leaned against the wall. He wished he could run away somewhere,

somewhere to heal and to lick his wounds in private, but for him even that was denied.

He stayed there for a long time staring at the wall opposite him with un-seeing eyes and then with a sigh he left for the infirmary wearing his invisibility cloak. He did not want to be greeted or asked by the many admirers about Voldemort, the same admirers who thought he was insane just a few days ago.

He cast a silencing charm on him as a first year heard his footsteps and seeing no one had squeaked in terror. He also cast a Notice-me-not charm on him and slowly neared the infirmary door. Hermione had still to wake up and Ron and Ginny were up though Pomfrey had insisted they be in bed for at least three days.

The doors of the infirmary were wide open as always and Harry forgetting he was under the invisibility cloak and had a silencing charm and a Notice-me-not charm on him looked at Ron who was busy sifting through the sweets to find one he liked and said, "Hey Ron, Ginny, how are you guys?"

He stopped as no sound came out and a startled smile came out on his sad face as he realized he was under a silencing charm plus an invisibility cloak. He was about to remove silencing charm when there was a flash and Fawkes was there with an angry trill?

Harry was bemused and bewildered as he stopped his actions and moved slightly away from Fawkes and a little closer to Ron to see what that note that was so obviously from Albus Dumbledore was all about.

Ron had removed the thread that tied the scroll tightly and unrolled the parchment. He looked up and looked carefully at Hermione and then at the door.

"Ron," Ginny said impatiently, "Will you stop looking around like a git and read what Dumbledore has written. Harry just visited us in the morning and he will not come till after dinner as he has everyday and Hermione is sooo obviously asleep. Or give it to me here. I will take care of it."

“Oh shut up Ginny. You know Harry must not know of our connections with Dumbledore and neither must Hermione. I am only being careful. So keep quiet and let me read.” Ron told equally rudely.

Harry was astounded and amazed. Ron and Ginny were having secret letters from Dumbledore that he and Hermione did not know about. What was in it? Harry went a little closer careful that his cloak hid him fully and casting the silencing charm over him once again.

“There will be an Order meeting of the Inner Circle tonight at half past ten on the fourth floor room behind the portrait of the Flowers, password is Flowery. Please ensure that Miss Granger is asleep. Will make sure Harry does not peep in. Fawkes will be your escort. Albus Dumbledore.” The note burst in to flames and vanished.

Ron looked at Ginny who was looking very thoughtful. “Why has he called for a meeting when it is barely three days after the fiasco at the Department of Mysteries? I still have to recover fully, though you are quite okay.”

“Well it must be something very important that he feels we must know, about Harry you know, and now he only has to take care of Harry as Hermione’s asleep anyway. What could it be anyway? About Harry I mean, otherwise he would not have called us.” She finished thoughtfully.

“Well we will know at half past ten tonight. Now shut up, I am going to sleep.” Ron turned on his side and closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Harry slowly backed off and then continued slowly till he was a little away from the infirmary and then he ran to the library and sat down there his heart thudding in his chest, because of running hard and because of the confusion, anger and most of all the betrayal he felt as he heard Ron and Ginny speak.

He sat there for almost an hour unable to come to terms with what he had heard and was only slightly relieved that Hermione was not included in it. But still from Ron this was the ultimate betrayal and he felt one more wall in his already battered and torn home crumbling and shattering as his trust and friendship with Ron came under the hammer.

It could be something that concerns the Weasleys he thought desperately. But then why have an Order meeting to discuss that. Dumbledore could have just come and spoke to them about it. And they were not at all surprised to see Fawkes bring letters about Order meetings. Then were they in the Order of the Phoenix?

Harry's head swirled as he tried to make sense of it all. He couldn't and after another fifteen minutes of sitting there he decided to go to that meeting of the Inner Circle of the Order and see for himself. Who were the Inner Circle members? His lips trembled at the thought he refused to entertain that Sirius too, might have known about Ron and Ginny's inclusion in the Inner Circle of the Order. He knew he would not be able to lift himself from that blow, if that came to light.

He straightened his shoulders and decided to go with his invisibility cloak and then stopped. Dumbledore had known during his second year in Hagrid's hut that they were there under the invisibility cloak, and in his first year too, when he was going to the Mirror of Erised. So he would have to find another way out of that. Dumbledore could also see auras and he would know in a jiffy that Harry was there.

He wished Hermione were here. She would have told him by now what to do and how to go about it. Suddenly he was fiercely glad that at least she was also not a party to this Order thing.

He sighed and then walked to the shelves for charms books. It was about four in the afternoon. That meant he had about six hours to find out about it, when another thought came to him frustrating him more. Moody, if he were there he would be able to look through anything. Harry became desperate for a minute when he thought that he would not be able to go, and then he decided to try. Who knew he could find out spells that would hide you from Moody's eye as well.

Harry diligently searched for all the six hours. He could find nothing. He was so frustrated he was already pulling at his hair. There was yet another pile of books, but all of the hundred or so were useless and he wished for the thousandth time that Hermione was here. It was nearing ten and he still did not know what to do.

He gave sigh and took out the next book from the pile he had yet to see and beneath the book he had taken was a huge tome that said

'How to be truly invisible and on it were the pictures of aura and magical eyes and the words 'hide from these' next to them. He eagerly took that and hastily turned the pages and with his wand returned all the books to their places, in case anybody would come in and see him looking up books on invisibility.

That book gave him the answer in the third chapter about hiding auras and in the sixth chapter about hiding from magical instruments like Moody's eyes. He did not realize that that book was above NEWT level and he memorized both the spells and then tried both on himself.

It took about twelve tries before he got the spells right as the book said and felt a double tingle go through him. Fear of being found out and excitement and anger about what he would find there made Harry draw in short breaths and he cast yet another silencing charm at himself as well as a Notice-me-not charm again.

He then looked up the counters to both and pulled out a piece of parchment and wrote both the spells and their counters and was about to close the book when he remembered Remus. He hurriedly went to the creatures section in that book and read about the spell to cast to subdue your scent and that took fifteen tries and then Harry banished that book to its place and walked out.

He did not know if he had succeeded though the spells had hit him correctly and had tingled properly as the book said, well he would know as he gate crashed the party, he thought with a good amount of fear and walked swiftly to the fourth floor. He was just ten minutes short of ten 'o' clock and he whispered Flowery about eight times panicking as the door did not open, before he realized he had a silencing charm on him.

Harry quickly removed it and whispered Flowery and walked in to the room that was still dark and as the door closed, it became very dark. He recast the silencing charm on himself and waited for the door to open so that he could see where he was. He moved away from the door along the side he was in holding on with his hands to the walls.

Sharp at ten, the door opened and Harry blinked at the light, panicking as Dumbledore and Moody came in followed by the others. The Weasleys, Remus Lupin, Tonks, Shacklebolt, Snape, McGonagall,

Hagrid and Diggle, Harry looked at all of them in amazement. There was no Ron or Ginny, though. The note had said half past ten, so there was obviously going to be another meeting after this.

Albus clapped his hands and there was silence, "We will first observe a moment's silence for Sirius." And the all of them stood up and were silent for a minute.

Then all of them discussed various things that sounded terribly dull to Harry. Then Molly asked Dumbledore about him.

"How is Harry, Albus? I saw Ron and Ginny, they were sleeping, but as Harry was not there I could not see him. How has he taken Sirius's falling through the veil?" Molly Weasley looked anxious as she asked Dumbledore.

"Very well, Molly, far better than I expected. I expected him to cry and howl the place down, but all he has been doing is walking up and down corridors and not talking much. He will be all right by the time he goes back to the Dursleys." Dumbledore told her as an amazed Harry listened on.

Harry had destroyed his office, yelled at him, had almost howled and had wanted out of everything in the Wizarding World and Dumbledore thought he was fine? What was wrong with him? Harry felt his respect for a man he had regarded so highly come a little down. Remus had to still ask for him, Harry thought sadly; maybe he was scared that Harry would kill him off as well.

Snape was sitting in the shadows, sneering at everyone for all he was worth. Harry glared at him. He still was not convinced that Snape had not delayed the message that brought the Order so late to do anything. They were not kids and they could apparate and could have come long before the six of them riding on threstals actually had arrived at the Department of Mysteries and still it had taken them half an hour after Harry and the others had arrived to come and help them.

"Severus, do you have anything for us?" Dumbledore asked with a smile.

“Lucius has come out of Azkaban and has pleaded his innocence,” he was cut off there as there was a lot of exclamations, shouting and yelling and Dumbledore clapped his hands shouting for silence.

“How did you know? There was no news from the Wizengamot where the trial should be held.” Dumbledore was frowning and getting a bit angry as he realized he had not been called or informed.

“The Dark Lord asked Rookwood to take a lowly death eater who admitted to Fudge that he had polyjuiced as Lucius in the Department of Mysteries. As soon as that man admitted his guilt, Fudge personally released Lucius from Azkaban.” Snape finished with another sneer.

Harry was shocked. Lucius Malfoy was out and that idiot Fudge was responsible. He turned to Moody who was saying something derogatory about Snape and Harry heartily agreed as Snape glared at Moody trying to kill him with his stare.

Dumbledore once again pacified Moody and Snape and then, “Is that all? Then I have a request to make of you Severus. This is the reason I called the Order meeting tonight. Severus, I want you to take Harry away to your cottage in the hills by the lake that you have and teach him Occlumency and Legilimency so that Voldemort will not attack him and place false memories, memories that caused us Sirius. I also wish that you teach him the rudimentary aspects of offensive and battle magic.”

There was a stunned silence and Harry himself was too horrified to speak, but it was not Remus but Molly who objected, forever earning Harry’s gratitude.

“Albus you know they hate each other so. Why do you insist they always be paired together? Harry would have learnt Occlumency if only someone else had taught him. Not,” she turned to Severus who was glaring and snarling at her and said hastily, “I do not mean any insult to you Severus, only that Harry’s temperament and yours do not match. Why don’t you assign this to Remus?”

Remus cleared his throat, “Molly now is not the time for me to be with Harry. I have just lost another person who accepted me as I was,”

Snape sneered here again, "And while my mind tells me Harry is not to blame; my heart does not allow me to forget that Sirius came out of Grimmauld Place only because of Harry. I will need some time to heal, before I can move with him as before. Please."

Harry shattered into a million pieces as he heard Remus, who had almost said Harry was responsible for the death of Sirius. While Harry knew at a deeper level that what he said was true, it devastated him totally as he stared with wide eyes full of hurt at Remus.

"So, your emotions are far more important to you than that of your dear departed friend's son who also accepted you as a wolf." The sarcastic voice of Snape made Remus flush, but he did not say anything more.

"Now, now Severus, Remus also needs time to grieve. Do not hassle him. Now Harry will be with the Dursleys for exactly one week, to strengthen the wards, then you may take him to Rose Cottage and help him to learn. I am very worried about him Severus. He does not have the aura that is comforting and now Sirius's death will further weaken the will of the boy to do strong magic." Dumbledore looked very worried, and seeing him all the others except Snape looked equally worried.

"Albus, Harry has to be strong. Otherwise how will he defeat Voldemort?" Remus was concerned and it showed in his voice.

"So your heart is not so far gone as to realize that it is your precious 'Golden Boy' that you need to defeat Voldemort, but your *heart*," here Snape was dripping with sarcasm, "does not want to have to do much with him. You certainly are clear, Lupin." Lupin flushed angrily, not able to refute what Snape was saying, but shamed he had put it into the open so uncaringly.

"I was saying that Harry has to be strong for himself, Severus not for me. Voldemort has been coming after him for a long while now and he is not going to stop because Harry is grieving." Snape merely sneered and turned to Dumbledore.

"I will not be able to take him Albus. While I hate to agree with Molly, what she says is true. I told you at the time you asked me to teach

him Occlumency and that failed because we have very little trust in each other. What you are asking me now will fail because of the same reason. I am a harsh teacher and Harry is an impertinent, ignorant, disobedient and uncaring school child.”

“That was very harsh Severus. Harry has always been polite to all of us and I am afraid you have allowed your childish enmity with James to spill over to Harry.” Molly was furious as Snape spoke so deprecatingly about Harry, whom she genuinely thought of as her very own.

Snape flushed with rage and once again Dumbledore brought the Order to silence though most of them were fuming. “Severus, I am afraid I cannot give you a choice as Harry needs to be molded. Molly you must understand that Harry needs the harshness. As Severus says he is too wayward and sometimes rather lax about obeying the rules. He would run rings around all of us, we are too soft with him, and Severus will make sure he learns. This will also pull Harry’s thoughts from his grief and he will concentrate. Please trust me on this.”

Dumbledore looked steadily at Severus and after some five minutes of sulking and scowling Snape nodded once and stood up. “If that is all, then I may as well go and enjoy what peace I have now as the next two months are going to be worse than time with the Dark Lord.”

Dumbledore smiled and nodded and that made the meeting come to a close as all of them left saying their good byes, leaving only Dumbledore and Moody. In five minutes they were joined by three other persons all of them Weasleys. Ron, Ginny and Percy.

“What happened? Why so late?” asked Ron as they sat down.

Harry who had been totally dazed by what he had heard in the last hour was now struggling to keep up with this. Ron and Percy were friends. Their parents never knew and Dumbledore encouraged it. What was going on and why?

“How are you two?” asked Percy looking at them. “Fine,” both of them answered together. Percy smiled and turned to Dumbledore looking at him expectantly.

"Fudge was in a closed door meeting with Rookwood and another man. Then he left very urgently." Percy started as Moody cut him off, "Severus already told us, Lucius is out of prison." Moody explained in brief about the release of Lucius from prison.

Percy was shocked as were Ron and Ginny. Dumbledore decided to start before Ron started on one of his pet peeves, ranting and raving about Malfoy.

"Ron, you must make sure Harry tells you everything. In the emotional aftermath of Sirius's death, Harry almost destroyed my offices. He should not have been able to do what he did. So keep your eyes open and encourage Harry to speak to you about everything. I am especially concerned about the link he shares with Voldemort. Your mother will come to take you both back home tomorrow and I will not get an opportunity to see you till School reopens.

"Ginny, this year you must win the affections of Harry's heart. You must make sure that both of you are a couple. Harry will be safe with you and he will not think of doing silly things during the year if he is occupied with you. Both of you must make sure Harry does not learn too much. That is the purpose of this meeting. I will deposit ten thousand galleons each in both your vaults tomorrow for this year. Now go and take rest. Goodnight."

Both of them nodded and left with Fawkes, and then Percy left too, after a few minutes left promising to scout for more news about the death eaters captured and what he could get on Fudge.

Left alone Dumbledore turned to Moody in concern and worry that was written all over his face.

"How could Harry destroy my office like that Alastor? I have bound more than sixty percent of Harry's magic and all of his gifts. Yet he has been able to cast a patronus that held off a hundred dementors in his third year and now he annihilated my office."

"Why do you worry? We have been building up the emotions in him nicely. When the time comes Potter will clash with Voldemort and both of them will die. Potter should not live, Albus as anybody with

the amount of raw power that he has can do a lot of harm if he so decides. We cannot watch him forever to see if he is turning dark.

“He sealed his fate in my opinion on the day he killed Voldemort sixteen years ago. A one year old baby killing a wizard of that caliber is dangerous to say the least. Now you keep calm and we will work it all out. Make sure Harry writes a will saying that he leaves everything for the reparation of the Wizarding World and makes you in charge of that. And above all don't tell him about his family vaults.”

Dumbledore nodded his head thoughtfully. “For that we have to make sure Harry lives for at least two years without getting into the clutches of Voldemort. The money he will receive at seventeen will come in good to rebuild our world. You are right as usual my friend. Well, let us hope Snape breaks Harry a bit more. Then he will be all alone and will listen to my gentle suggestions as Remus has also decided to stay away for some time. Sirius was a thorn in our side,” he was cut off as Moody spoke gruffly.

“He was an ass.” Moody said bluntly. “He thought the world of Potter and was beginning to get suspicious about your intentions for his Godson in the end. Good he went.”

Harry stared not aware of how his body was trembling or the hate that shone in his eyes as Dumbledore once again nodded his head in agreement. “Yes good he went or else I would have had to do something to incapacitate him forever.” Dumbledore became Harry's enemy from that moment. “Come let us go. We have long days now.”

Harry stood there in the darkness for almost an hour struggling with his emotions and all that he had heard. He felt that his head would explode with the amount of information it had received in that one hour.

He just could not deal with it and process the information he had heard and could not take it anymore. He stumbled out and walked along; removing all the charms he had cast on himself and removing his cloak, went to the dungeons. He knocked at the door of the potions classroom and after five minutes Snape opened the door, a sharp question on his lips.

Before Snape could ask him anything however, Harry spoke his voice slurring and thick with the effort of keeping the emotions at bay. He was careful not to look at Snape in the eye and bending his head down, "Sir, I just cannot get sleep. Please may I have a vial of the Dreamless Sleep potion?"

Snape was about to speak angrily to him and tell him off for wandering after hours in the dungeons and just what Harry could do with his request when he saw the defeated posture and the struggle Harry was having in controlling of his emotions. Snape shut his mouth and silently went inside and brought out a vial and handed it over to him.

"Thank you Sir." That was all Harry said before he took off at a run and panting reached the Gryffindor dormitory and giving the password, he went inside, mechanically washed and cleaned before he cast silencing charms at the curtains and drowned the vial of the Dreamless Sleep potion. The next second he was out like a light falling into a blessed sleep.

Chapter – 2

Harry woke up that evening to find that Ron and Ginny had already left for The Burrow.

“Harry! What happened to you? You have been asleep since yesterday night and professor Dumbledore came in with Snape and McGonagall to check on you. Then Snape told Dumbledore that you had asked for Dreamless sleep and Dumbledore smiled and went away.”

Harry blinked at all the information he received. He shook his head feeling disoriented and lost and then terrible, as the events of last night crowded on to his brain. He pushed them down, deciding to take care of it later in private and smiled falteringly at Neville. “What time is it, Nev and how are you?”

“I am fine Harry,” Neville beamed at Harry at the concern in Harry’s voice and continued, “I was just going down for dinner. It is about half past seven. Also Ron and Ginny have left and told me to tell you to take care and that they will write soon.” Harry could not stop the wave of hate he felt at hearing their names and the angry scowl that came on his face as Neville told him about them.

Fortunately Neville did not notice as he was already turning away to close his trunk and go down to the Great Hall. Harry thought of not going down to dinner for some time but decided to go down to the Great Hall as Dumbledore would see him and nod in that all-knowing way and let him be. Otherwise he might come to the dorm to check up on him and Harry was not sure he could manage a solicitously false enquiry and be alone with Dumbledore just now. To add to everything he was so very hungry.

He dragged himself out of bed and went to the bathroom and stood under the hot shower and felt a lot refreshed. He pulled on a pair of clean robes and walked out of the dorm, not looking at anyone in the eye, smiling a little as the few Gryffindors who were there called out to ask how he was and walked out and down to the Great Hall.

The Hall was almost empty of students, though all the professors were there. Harry sat down in his usual place as Dumbledore, McGonagall and Snape all looked at him sharply. He felt their glances but did not look up. He filled his plate and forced himself to eat. The moment he started eating his hunger took over and he ate a full meal. The moment he finished, he left the hall to go to the library and sat there trying to make sense of everything.

He did not dare write anything down and he was trying to go through everything in his mind and he was getting hopelessly confused when the worried voice of his Headmaster interrupted him sending him into a panic. "Harry, how are you feeling now? You had asked Severus for the dreamless sleep potion yesterday?" Dumbledore was there looking at Harry in a very concerned way.

Harry glanced up at him for a brief second and nodded his head shakily, praying that he would not let his anger, betrayal and knowledge show. "Yes Sir, I am feeling fine now." and very quietly Harry added, "I am sorry to have destroyed your office that...that day."

"That is all right Harry. Do not worry about it. If you need anything you only have to ask." Dumbledore told him kindly and then left. Harry just sat there for sometime putting his head in his hands feeling so helpless and wondering if Dumbledore was lurking around or had he left his precious Gryffindor Savior to his miseries.

After about half an hour Harry went to the dorm and told the others he would sleep in early once again. "Hey! You are fine aren't you?" asked Dean Thomas looking at Harry. Harry nodded his head. "Just tired, that's all." and went up the stairs that led to the dorm.

He undressed and went to bed, tightly drawing the curtains around him and cast a silencing spell on them. He sat for more than two hours thinking on various events in which Dumbledore had intervened at the right time and many other events that might have been influenced by him indirectly. Then taking out a parchment he wrote down everything he remembered.

Magic bound and suppressed, must find a way to release it to full potential.

Ron and Ginny working for Dumbledore and he wants to kill me because I am linked with Voldemort and am more powerful than I should be.

Don't know about Hermione.

Have to find a way to learn stuff and defeat Voldemort for my parents and Dumbledore for Sirius.

Harry had to blink his eyes several times after writing this as he now knew that Dumbledore had probably kept Sirius in Azkaban deliberately so that he could not get custody of Harry, while he did not have proof of this, he had heard Dumbledore and Moody say that it was a good thing that Sirius was gone.

What family vaults, have to find out about them. How?

The Dursleys, did Dumbledore charm them to hate me and does he have spells to find out what I do there as last year he seemed to know uncle Vernon was going to throw me out and his howler came in exactly at that time.

Snape and how to tackle him?

Subjects to study – Occlumency, Legilimency, wandless magic – that was what the lumos was when the dementors came, dueling and other branches of magic that might help.

Unlocking his gifts - what gifts and how to unlock them?

Cannot trust anybody; have to do this on my own. Have to take care of Voldemort and Dumbledore and Ron, Ginny, Percy and Moody.

That sentence made him feel truly miserable and he sat there for some time wallowing in his misery and sadness that he was not destined to have anyone who cared enough to look beyond the barriers, and the friends and the man he had truly looked upon as people who were his were now plotting to kill him.

Harry was not scared of dying as he was more or less prepared for the fact that Voldemort would finish him off sooner or later. The

Prophecy only assured him that his thoughts were correct. What he had been praying for was that he would take Voldemort with him as he went down. If somehow he would survive he was grateful to the powers that be.

Now all that had changed as Harry was determined not only to defeat Voldemort but others in the Light and try to live through all that just for the reason that they wanted him dead. That would be his tribute to Sirius and to his parents' who had sacrificed their lives so that Harry may live.

He memorized all that he had written and then wrote a few more sentences.

Things to do to achieve what he had written above;

Go to Gringotts somehow before going to the Dursleys and meet with the goblins.

That would be the most difficult to do, Harry knew.

Access money on a continuous basis, both muggle and magical

Unlock gifts and full magical potential right here in School before leaving

Harry thought a bit more deeply and then wrote;

Room of requirement will provide all the stuff necessary

Memorize all the stuff from the Room of Requirement, write it down in your parchment and also scan aura; Dumbledore said aura was not comforting so find out and if aura changes after unlocking magic make sure that there is a way to keep same aura as now after unlocking suppressed magic so that Dumbledore will not be suspicious.

Harry snorted a bit after that. For all that Dumbledore said he might already be operating at his full potential. Well he would know soon.

He memorized all this as well and then cast an *incendio* at that parchment and swallowed the ashes. Then a bit satisfied he was doing something to avenge his parents and Sirius, went to sleep.

He woke up late the next morning, enjoying the undisturbed sleep that he had yesterday, without any nightmares of the Department of Mysteries. He wondered a bit at that but put it down to the new purpose that filled his life.

He walked briskly walked off to the showers and felt fresher after that and then filling his bag with loads and loads of parchment and invisibility cloak and then went down to find Hermione, waiting with a beaming smile on her face. He stared at her without saying anything and her smile faltered.

"Harry?" she asked hesitantly looking at him with a concern that almost made him weep. He suddenly came to a decision and he dragged her out of the common room and went to a random corridor and cast a silencing spell around them.

"Can you tell me loudly at the Great Hall that I must not be like this and that you need to talk to me in your most bossy tone?" he asked her.

She gaped and gaped and thought Harry had lost it completely. Harry saw her look and smiled a genuine smile at her, "I'll explain everything after breakfast, swear, please Hermione will you do this for me?" he asked her with a pleading look on his face.

She was not convinced and she still thought he was too far gone, but she nodded dubiously anyway. Harry cancelled the silencing charm and both of them went to the Great Hall.

"How is Ron? And Ginny? I did not see both of them, though Neville looked fine." She said busy filling her plate and so missed the look of pure hate on Harry's face.

"Yeah they are both fine and Mrs. Weasley has taken them to The Burrow to heal." Hermione looked up at the tone of that voice but wisely refrained from commenting anything. She saw that Harry had a good breakfast though he was very silent after that statement.

As they were about to get up, Hermione looked at him and caught hold of his arm, "Harry you must stop this right now. Come on I want to speak to you before classes." She said loudly.

"What classes Hermione? Classes have been cancelled for the rest of the year." Harry told her enjoying the look of shock on her face.

"What!!!!" she asked astounded that they could have cancelled classes, even though they had already given their OWLS they could have been assessing their papers.

"Come on," was all Harry said and he took her to the seventh floor to the picture of Barnaby and walked three times thinking hard. Harry actually needed a place to tell Hermione everything show her everything as well as the materials needed for his research and plans.

A door opened and Harry and Hermione walked into a room that was filled with books and a table with a pensieve on it and a comfortable sofa facing it.

Of course, Harry thought, he could show it all to her. She would be more convinced that way. But he did not know how to remove the memories from his head and place it on to the pensieve. She had looked at the room once and now was facing the door and was fiddling with her wand near it.

Immediately there was writing on the Black board that was behind the pensieve.

Hold your wand tip to your temple and think of a specific memory and slowly pull it out. Break the connection after you have pulled out what you wanted to.

Harry thought back to last afternoon where Ron received the letter and then his research and then the Order meeting. He almost did not show her the main Order meeting not wanting to see the same accusation in her eyes as Remus's but then he shrugged. He would know whether to trust her with what he had to do or if he did not have even Hermione, who had stayed with him all this time never wavering even during the fight with Ron in their fourth year.

He placed them in the pensieve and then he held her hand and both of them put their face into it. The next minute they were falling down and Hermione stood through the whole thing silently, her right hand holding her mouth in horror and her left hand clutching Harry so strongly that he was beginning to feel numb.

Both of them came out automatically as the memories ended and then there was a deathly drop silence as Harry lifted the memories and placed them into his head, again following the writing on the Black board.

"How could all of them?" Hermione whispered aghast as she looked at Harry with tears in her eyes.

"How could Ron and Ginny betray you like this and for *money*? And Remus, I thought better of him and the worst of them all Dumbledore, oh Harry you realize what he said didn't you? I bet he kept Sirius in Azkaban deliberately so that he could not get access to you."

Tears overflowed from her eyes and Harry just stood there trying his best not to join her in the open weeping. After about ten minutes, Hermione wiped her eyes and she looked at him, "Okay, we know all this now," she began in a determined voice that was just a little shaky and frightened.

"We know where we stand and Harry we are most likely fighting with Voldemort, Dumbledore and Ron. That means the Order, the Dark forces and because of this mess the Ministry of Magic as well. We have to make a list of things to do and also plan on how we are going to beat the tar out of all of them. Harry?" She noticed that he was just standing there looking at her with so much gratitude that she was bewildered for a second, and then she understood.

"You said we; thanks Hermione and you will never know how much." His voice broke on the last word as he stopped, trying to get his emotions under control. After a little while he continued.

"I also need to tell you something else that Dumbledore told me about on that night." Harry told her shakily as he told her about the Prophecy and she stared at him with so much horror in her face. "Oh Harry," was all that she said.

“So if you want out I will understand, only please don’t tell what I told you just now to anyone. I just needed to share it with someone.” He told her feeling so alone.

She went to him and hugged him fiercely. “You were my first friend and Ron became my friend only because of you Harry. Of course I will help you as much as I can, I thought Ron and I,” she broke off looking a bit wistful and then angrily continued, “from when did he start this and why? Where does Percy fit into all this and most importantly we have to plan for so many things?”

“I have already made a list,” and he dictated to the board and Hermione nodded approvingly. “Come on Harry we have work to do. Start with the books on aura and I want to look through the potion books here.” She looked around and soon was taking down potion books from the potion section. Harry had gone to the aura section and removed a whole lot of books before taking even more books Occlumency and Legilimency.

He merely wrote the names of the books and authors and returned all the other books back except those on aura and started looking through for finding out his aura that he sported at present and how to change his aura to fool others.

He found information in the seventh book. Hermione in the meantime had taken the parchments from him and had already started writing down great lengths. He sighed and turned back to his own research.

An aura is an indication of your character and power that can never lie. Only the most powerful can even attempt to see the aura and it is the people with the silver or the golden aura who can even see the aura with the naked eye. In rare cases people with a green aura are able see auras around them.

An aura can be seen by a powerful wizard by simply concentrating on the outline of the person whose aura you wish to see. You will be able to slowly make out the blurred outlines of vague colors in the beginning but you are practiced it will almost come instantaneously as the mind is able to comprehend and understand your need to see the aura in a fraction of a second and work automatically to see the aura.

You may change your aura only to colors that indicate a lower power level than what you have. For example, if you are a wizard with a pink aura you will not be able to hide your aura with green or silver which are higher than your power level. Remember only the powerful can change auras, it is not for the average witch or wizard.

*For all the others, to find your aura all you have to do is point your wand at you and say the words *aura revealis* and check for the aura. The aura colors are white, brown, yellow, red, blue, pink, purple, green, silver and golden. White is the color represented by the lowest power and golden by the highest amount of power found in a wizard and witch.*

*To change your aura point your wand at yourself and say *aurametocangis* it will automatically move to a color that is one color less than your own. If you need to go down one more power level, then say the same spell and go down one more color.*

If you need to find out that a person has changed their aura, remember that only very powerful wizards can do it in the first place, you will know by seeing a jagged line that outlines their changed aura, a very thin outline not visible very clearly to the naked eye.

Auras are an indication of your true character and power. While auras are read as they are to determine power levels, by taking the predominant color that surrounds you, to determine character the combination of various colors are taken into account.

Red says anger and a short temper and from that you may be rest assured that the wizard is rash and brash, brown indicates sluggishness, yellow laziness, white sickness, pink harmony and good cheer, blue very analytical and logical, purple very powerful and has leadership qualities and is spiritually inclined and may have a bad tendency to dominate, green sheer power and harmony along with selflessness and silver and golden are higher rungs of green.

Black is a color to beware of in a wizard as Black means cruelty, a tendency towards evil and a keen desire to dominate and destroy. Wizards who can see auras usually have an aura that is green, silver, golden or Black. Otherwise this spell would reveal it to you for a second, for you to assess.

“Hermione, I have found the thing about how to see aura and how to change them.” She beamed at Harry as he told her all about it, “Well I also have a list of potions and spells,” he noticed that she had moved from potions to charms books that were lying on the table. Well, the first thing to do is to make the potion to release your magic and then another potion to see your gifts and then we will conceal your aura and take it on from there.”

Harry looked at her both bemused and grateful, that he had someone with him in this madness that was threatening to overwhelm him completely.

“The first thing to do though is to see your aura now so that we can make sure that your aura is the same later. What was the spell? Say it one more time?” she asked him wand ready in her hand. “Afterward will you apply it to me and tell me what my aura is and if it has been changed?” she asked him slightly scared as she thought that Dumbledore could have done that to her as well.

“Shall I cast it first at you?” Harry asked her. She nodded nervously as Harry raised his hand and cast the spell to reveal the aura. He had to cast it almost twelve times before his anger gave his magic a boost and he saw her aura that was pink and patches of purple and no jagged line around to suggest that her aura had been tampered with.

“Well, you are safe. Your aura is pink and purple and no jagged line. So no tampering.” He told her making exaggerated motions of being relieved.

Suddenly Hermione flicked her wand and the room became a cozy place with sofas and tea cups and snacks and another flick all her and Harry’s notes went into her bag.

“Come on Harry, you cannot be like this. You have to get over Sirius. How many times should I tell you this? We are all there for you, Ron and me, all the Weasleys, Professor Lupin and Tonks and all of us. You can’t bottle all your feelings inside the entire time okay. I wish Ron were here. He would have brought you out of your dumps. Well, both of us are not going anywhere till you speak out.”

Harry was shocked and for a minute he thought she had gone mad. He was about to open his mouth and really snap something rude at her when she spoke again. "I am going to get Professor Dumbledore right now to speak to you about Sirius if you don't get off that look from your face."

Harry opened his mouth to tell her to shut up and get out, "Harry, please keep quiet for a second, while I explain to you why you must not bottle up your emotions, please be quiet for a few minutes and please understand what I am about to say, okay you are not going to, let me check your map for professor Dumbledore and I will bring him here if you are going to be sulky."

Harry was horrified as she spoke and was about to scream at her and actually push her out, when she ran to him and hugged him; "I am sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry..." Harry just gaped at her thinking she was really off her rockers, when she started sniffing, tears running down her eyes.

"Someone was here invisibly Harry. When we came here and I saw the pensieve, I cast a spy spell, on the door that would tell me if Dumbledore or any of the professors came here to check. I had set the alarm to go off if anyone came within three feet near the Room of Requirement. The alarm tripped me off saying someone was here and that was why I changed the room and started speaking to you about Sirius. It must have been Dumbledore and now he will not disturb us again."

He realized how clever she had been and he was so thankful he had her on his side. "Thanks Hermione. I was shocked and a little angry, I guess. I really did not know why you were talking all that. But I did not see him open the door." He told her sheepishly and with just a touch of defiance.

"Yes he did not, but he could have cast an illusion of the door and have opened the door or maybe he was standing outside and overhearing or maybe he cast a see through charm on the door so that he could see straight inside. You really don't know with Dumbledore especially now." Hermione explained to him as he gaped at all the things Dumbledore could do.

"Now you have to cast the aura charm at yourself now Harry." She told him smiling and he pointed the wand at himself and cast the spell. This time he got it the first time. "Well your color is blue." She told him, "And there is a jagged line to show it has been changed."

She smiled at him, "Come on we have work to do. We have to go to Hogsmeade and buy these potions," she frowned, "no Diagon Alley will be better, no one will recognize us if we go there with a small glamour and we are safe."

"Great! We can also go to Gringotts then." Harry was delighted, as he had been breaking his head about how to tackle that particular problem.

"No Harry, we cannot be away for that long and we have to make sure we get back before we are missed. How much money do you have? I will bring all of mine as well as some of these ingredients are very expensive and it would be better if we do not steal from Snape as he will be in charge of you during the holidays and he will suspect you the moment something goes missing."

Harry had to reluctantly agree and both of them used Harry's spells he had learnt the day before and concealed their auras and scent for good measure and Hermione transfigured their robes into ordinary robes for everyday use and with a glamour to change their looks and slowly crept out under the invisibility cloaks and walked swiftly to the one-eyed witch and went down the tunnel and soon were in Hogsmeade and they took the floo from The Three Broomsticks and landed in Diagon Alley.

They walked swiftly a little scared and exited at doing something so daring and went into the apothecary. Hermione had also used a voice altering charm along with a notice me not that made Harry gawk at her in shock when she spoke. She briskly gave the list of potion ingredients, "Please could you tell me how much this costs as I have some more potions to order." She told the manager.

That man did not even look at them twice and swiftly calculating told them an amount that was well within their limits and Hermione gave him a second list. "I have mixed a lot of common ingredients so that

he would not know why we are buying these.” She leaned over and whispered to him.

In no time they had finished and Hermione asked the man to shrink the package for them and they almost ran back to The Leaky Cauldron and took the floo. They popped their invisibility cloaks over them and went through the dark passage and went back to the Room of Requirement. The whole exercise had taken an hour and a half.

Hermione decided to keep then potions with her so that no one would suspect anything, “Harry, I will also go back to the Room of Requirement and brew them. You stay on here and if you are conspicuously present Dumbledore will not think of looking for me. I will come in at intervals whenever I can leave the potions so that no one will be the wiser.”

Harry nodded his head and changing his look to sullen went down to the Great Hall after removing all their spells and glamour. Harry sat sullen all the time during dinner and Hermione seemed to be scolding him about something and he seemed to be rebelling. Dumbledore, Snape and McGonagall saw this display and while Dumbledore smiled Snape and McGonagall frowned. They turned to each other and McGonagall nodded once very briefly, so briefly that no one not even Dumbledore noticed.

Harry and Hermione finished dinner, they were very hungry as they had skipped lunch and went to their common room and sat down with the others for sometime talking nothing really. “Hey, Harry how are you feeling? Better?” asked Neville smiling shyly. Harry nodded and smiled back at him, “Yeah Neville I am feeling fine now, though a bit sleepy.”

“Me too, though I don’t know why? We really haven’t done anything really, no studies, no Snape, nothing, still,” Dean shook his head as he and Seamus who was still a bit awkward around Harry went up to their dorm. Taking this as their cue, Harry and Hermione also thankfully escaped.

Harry lay awake for a long time, thinking over everything and when he went to sleep it was with the prayer that he would not do anything

foolish to kill of Hermione as he did Sirius. When he did sleep his cheeks were wet with the tears he had contained while awake.

End of Chapter – 2

Chapter – 3

Minerva McGonagall walked briskly to her quarters and taking an old chess set flood to Snape's quarters in the dungeons. She had been watching Harry since he had come back from the Department of Mysteries and she was very worried. Albus now-a-days seemed so uncaring of Harry, especially this fifth year when Harry was already having to deal with too much in her opinion. While Harry may have not noticed anything out of the ordinary she had, and she had been very concerned.

She had not liked any of the things Albus had done in Harry's case, she now realized as she stepped out of the floo and brushed her robes. He had left Harry with uncaring people and she had watched him come back to School undernourished and edgy. She was related to the Potters distantly and she had been one of the wizards and witches who had volunteered to take care of Harry, and she had pushed hard to gain custody.

Albus had not budged, though and Harry had gone to those pathetic muggles. Now as she greeted Snape with a smile, she knew he was not deceived and he was on full alert as he looked at her warily, helping her set the chess set. While they played regularly and with Albus's knowledge, in fact he joined them on many occasions, today was not about a chess game and both of them knew it.

Minerva on her part knew what she had come here to say while Snape only had his suspicions. Both of them were silent at first and the Minerva started the conversation.

"Thank you for seeing me under a pretext of a chess game Severus. While I do not usually hide any thing important from Albus, today I wanted to speak to you about Harry and without Albus's knowledge. Your quarters are so completely warded, I felt safe in coming here."

"Well," Snape drawled, very surprised, but not showing it, "You speak as if your own are not so clean. I know that you are as paranoid as I about your privacy from an old coot that both of us know as the Headmaster." He finished as he handed her a drink.

She smiled her thanks, took a sip and making her first move on the board spoke to him, "Yes, Albus is notoriously inquisitive about all of us and while I know it is for the greater good and generally tend to agree with him on many issues, what he attempts to do with Harry is not what I agree or approve of."

Snape made his move swiftly as he spoke, "Why Minerva, I am surprised. You of all people are speaking against Albus in *this* matter and so far as I can see, Albus has done a little too much for that ungrateful boy and Potter, I think is wholly undeserving of it in my opinion." He finished acidly as Minerva contemplated thoughtfully both Snape and the chess board as she made her next move.

"You couldn't be more wrong Severus. You taught him Occlumency. Surely you must have had an insight into what type of muggles those people are, the Dursleys, I mean."

"Yes," Snape told her, "I did see Minerva. But that is no excuse to disobey or disregard the rules and your elders or to poke your nose into things that are not of your concern." He told her unable to keep the coldness from his voice as he remembered the pensieve and his utter humiliation that Harry had witnessed what had been his most mortifying moment of his School years.

She smiled once again, moving her knight into an attacking position, "You are offended that Harry went into your pensieve and he saw you hanging upside down showing your knickers?"

Snape started, surprised and then shocked. So Potter had broadcast it to one and all. His face became very bitter as he thought of all the students knowing about his degradation and he retorted sharply, "I might have known Minerva, Potter could not keep such a fact to himself. Why have Albus and the other Order members not enquired of me and ridicule me about it I wonder?"

Minerva looked up startled now as she heard Snape's bitter voice and his assumptions. "As far as I know not even Ron and Hermione know of this. He apparently asked the Twins to create a distraction and went into Umbridge's room, highly foolish in my opinion and called for Sirius and Remus and then flayed them."

Snape stared at her obviously dumbfounded at the statement that Harry Potter should flay anyone let alone Black about *his* mortification, "Why? It was such a glorious thing wasn't it? Snape the greasy git humiliated and showing his knickers to one and all." He replied flushing bitterly as he thought of that day.

"Ah! You see Severus, Harry did not feel so. He ranted at them and told Sirius that James was not much better than Dudley his cousin, whom he despises and when Sirius told him they were all very young and impetuous he told him that he, Harry was fifteen and he would not do something so degrading even to Malfoy." McGonagall laughed softly at Snape as he gaped at her open mouthed, unable to comprehend the Harry Potter he knew and the Harry Potter Minerva was talking about.

"He told them he felt ashamed and he could not believe how arrogant James had been and had implied that all of us had been lying about his father as a wonderful person. Sirius had apologized then and had tried to pacify Harry. He confided in me and at the next meeting that we had and asked me to look out for him as his Head of House and he said that was planning to show Harry a lot of good memories of his father, the good things he had done so that Harry would not feel let down by James's behavior, that Harry had been unfortunate to witness. But now he cannot as he too, is gone." she finished sadly.

Snape was very still as he heard Minerva speak and he was totally astounded. Potter had defended him? That alone was enough to give him nightmares; over and above that he had been sharply critical of his father. Black would have cringed at the thought that Potter would think so less of his father and his friends. Well, that had been a revelation of a very confusing nature.

It presented Potter in a different light and Snape while had seen enough of his memories to realize Potter had less than a comfortable home life, he had thought him rash and disobedient.

"You call him impetuous Severus, but Harry has hardly any opinion about authority. To him, elders are not necessarily better and authority probably means suppression. He is so used to relying on

himself; to accept help for him is a sign of weakness he cannot afford to have.”

She was pleading now, “Look at it from his point of view. When has anybody consulted him on anything concerning him? When is he Severus, even respected as a boy in his own right? Severus, Harry has no one to call his own.

“Even Neville has his grandmother to come for him and ask questions if anything goes wrong. Can you step out of your limits with Ron? No because Molly will lynch you. But Harry? He has no one to talk for him, no one to care for him and now he has no one he cares about.” She stopped there unable to go on for a moment, so angry she was.

“How dare Remus say those words at the Order meeting?” she was ranting now, her eyes furious and sparkling with anger and unshed tears.

“We ask so much of the boy, we tell him to face and defeat You-Know-Who for us, but what do we do in return Severus? Nothing, Sirius was right all along. He wanted Harry to have more information; information if Harry had had would have made him more cautious. But none of us told him anything and he had to act with what little he knew. He only knew Sirius was in danger and he was likely to lose the one man who represented not only his parents and family, but a normalcy he was never blessed to have, a man who did not expect anything from him, who cared for him and who saw him only as Harry.” She wiped her eyes and sniffed and calmed down visibly.

“Now I know why you came here. You wanted to get it off your chest.” Snape told her attempting to calm her down, his own thoughts in utter chaos and swirling with confusion.

“Sorry, Severus. I had no right to let go like this and I did not come for this alone.”

Snape smiled at her, “You wish to rant and rave some more. Be my guest.”

She was deadly serious, though. "I want your assurance you will keep what I say in confidence as well as what I just spoke, well all right ranted and raved to you?" seeing him nod his head, she smiled.

"I am distantly related to Harry." Seeing his shocked look, "yes, not many people know of it, in fact apart from Albus you are the second person to know. I pushed very hard for custody of Harry. Artemus Potter, Harry's great – great grand father and my great grand mother were first cousins.

"When James died, I told Albus that I would resign my job here and take care of Harry. Albus refused and I went to see and scrutinize the type of people that would have custody of Harry. I spent a whole day there before Harry came that night and I spent the next week there as a cat, Severus, they were horrible. That is the word I would use. That woman used to change him only once a day and she would feed him only twice." Minerva stopped there unable to go on.

"They were horrible." She whispered again and stopped.

Snape was silent as was Minerva for a long time. Then she spoke again, "I came here to ask you to go softly on Harry. He will disobey you, especially now that his lack of Occlumency skills for which he alone is responsible has cost him Sirius. He will try to take it out on you as he does not understand you or particularly like you very much and in all honesty you have not helped as well. Please Severus, understand. If you don't then, well thank you for at least letting me get his off my chest."

She stood up and with a flick of her hand packed her chess board and smiled at Severus once again, nodded and left.

Snape sat there for a very long time staring into the fire and sipping his drink.

Harry woke up with a purpose as he thought of unlocking his magic and gifts. Who knew this could be the power the Dark Lord knows not. May be this could even speed up his spell casting and concentration and other things that he was so lacking in.

Hermione had told him that the two potions that would unlock his suppressed magical powers and the other that would unlock his gifts would take a few hours to brew. It would take the whole of today and Harry wanted to tackle the issue of going to Gringotts before going to the Dursleys.

He came down to find Hermione was not there. He waited for a few minutes before Parvati Patil came down with Lavender Brown. "Hey is Hermione still upstairs?"

Both of them giggled and Harry was baffled at that as he had not asked anything remotely funny. "No, she is not upstairs Harry." And giggled again and went down to the Great Hall.

Harry also shook his head and went down to have his breakfast. He saw Hermione sitting there pouring over her books, earning a lot of incredulous looks and sarcastic comments from their classmates.

"Harry, look at her, OWLS are over and she is still pouring over her books." Dean laughed as Harry came and sat down, smiling a little at the others.

"Morning Hermione, what gives?" he asked nodding at the books.

"I am just looking through our NEWTS books, Harry. NEWTS are so much harder than OWLS and I want to start right now." she replied amidst sniggers from the others.

Harry smiled a little at her knowing that she was doing something else entirely and he was proved right, when she huffed a little and muttering angrily about nothing and got up abruptly, "Bye Harry I will be seeing you, may be at lunch." And Hermione left the Great Hall to most likely go to the library.

"Can't you guys go easy on her? You know she likes to study." Harry glared a little at all of them. Dean just shrugged and looked uncomfortable and they turned to other things. Harry once again wandered aimlessly, thinking hard.

He finally went to the library and sat down there waiting for Hermione to either call him or come down. Waiting for lunch time to come, Harry

was bored. He went to lunch and Neville told him, she had come had lunch hurriedly, muttering about something to do with elves and had left.

Harry had not wanted to do any referencing in the library as he did not want Dumbledore to get suspicious, so he stayed in full sight, slightly sullen and grieving which he was, really.

After lunch he took a walk outside around the lake thinking hard and getting his thoughts into perspective. It was so sad he had no one to trust and no one to call his own. Even Remus thought him to be responsible for Sirius. Why did they not understand that if only they had told him something about what they were guarding and some real information about the scar link, he would have been a lot more cautious?

Dumbledore, why did he not want Harry to live? Even if Dumbledore thought Harry was truly powerful; so what about it? He had to be concerned only if Harry was bad or evil or dark. Just because he was powerful did not mean a death sentence did it? Perhaps he felt that Harry would surely turn dark because he had this link with Voldemort?

Well, even if he had Dumbledore had no right to make unilateral decisions about anything. Even if he wanted to do away with him, he had to wait and see if he would turn dark, before plotting and planning to kill him.

It was dinner before he saw Hermione and she was looking very pleased with herself. She nodded to him and whispered as he sat down next to her smiling reluctantly.

“Both the potions are finished Harry and you will take it tonight in your dorm, okay. I will come in at about eleven, so hand me your invisibility cloak and open the door as if to go out to the common room for a minute at eleven, okay?” Harry nodded his head still looking sullen, but his eyes were sparkling for the first time since Sirius fell through the veil.

They had a leisurely dinner chatting, rather Hermione was chatting with Neville, Dean and Seamus her anger of the morning all forgotten and Harry was listening.

After all of them left in a group to the Griffindor common room and continued their chat. Slowly all of them left one by one and Harry too, went to bed, though he did not sleep.

Exactly at eleven Harry went yawing and stretching to open the door to go to the common room and he felt something brush him by. He went down, stayed for about five minutes and then came up to apparently go back to sleep.

He opened his curtains and shut them tightly and turned to find Hermione standing there in her night clothes and wand in her hand, busy casting silencing charms and securing the curtains to stay shut. Then she once again took Harry's invisibility cloak and went to each of the beds and cast a sleeping charm on all of them.

"There, all of them will sleep till tomorrow morning. Harry, there is one thing you must be careful of though. You may fall unconscious as the magic unravels in you and if you don't wake up before five tomorrow morning, I will alter the aura as you sleep and you must say that you had a Dreamless Sleep potion that put you off like that."

"From where did you get that?" Harry was taken aback at what Hermione was saying.

"I bought it at the apothecary the other day. Now come on, let me check on your aura once again and then you take the first potion that is the one which will release your suppressed and bound magic." She ran her wand over Harry and re-checked his aura and then with a shaky smile opened it and gave it to him.

Harry drank the shockingly normal tasting potion and a second later slumped down on his bed. He woke up three hours later and stretched and found Hermione snoring slightly, sleeping in a sitting position, her head on the head board of his bed.

Harry felt so light. That was the word, he felt so light and so fresh as if a huge burden had been taken off him. He nudged Hermione and she woke up with a start and squealed when she found Harry was awake.

“How do you feel Harry?”

“So light and good Hermione, so good it is as if a heavy backpack has been lifted off me.” She grinned delighted.

“Great Harry, now let me test your aura and also change it to blue, that was the color Dumbledore gave you.” She cast the aura spell and then gasped.

“What?” Harry asked her anxious. He had been hoping for a green aura and praying that magic would come far more easily to him now.

“Oh Merlin, Harry Dumbledore has done you a great injustice. Your aura is a beautiful sheen of silver with green and golden lines. Near your temple is a very, very small dot of Black, where your scar is. It is like a mole almost invisible.” She hugged Harry who was so shocked that he could not answer.

Silver with green and golden lines; that were amazing and far more than he had hoped for. Harry desperately prayed that this be the power the dark lord knows not.

Hermione was already bringing his aura back to blue. “Okay now that is done, let us try the next thing. We’ll see what kind of gifts are there for you. All you have to do Harry is to drink this and place a drop of blood on this parchment and your gifts and the magical abilities for which you have special talent will be known. I am also going to try this and here, yours.”

Both of them drowned their potion vials that tasted like dead frogs and retched simultaneously. Giggling both of them pricked their thumbs and let a drop of blood fall on to the parchment.

Aura sight

Wandless magic

Parcel magic

Potions

Animagus

Spell crafting

Runic magic

Dark Arts

Blood magic

Elemental magic

Harry looked at the list in a daze. What the hell was this? He looked at Hermione and silently held out his parchment. She took it and gaped at it and then at him.

“Wow, Harry someone up there likes you. This is an impressive array of gifts,”

“And it might have saved Sirius if only I had this power unlocked and these gifts properly trained.” Harry said bitterly.

Hermione paled and then looked very sad. “Yes. Now, though, we will use it to destroy Voldemort who killed your parents and use the power to deal with Dumbledore who wanted use you and then throw you away. Now let us get to sleep and we will discuss in the morning.”

“The Dark Arts Hermione, maybe Dumbledore had a point to kill me off if I had a tendency towards the parcel magic, Dark Arts and Blood magic.” Harry was shocked that he was a Dark wizard as he knew the Dark Arts, blood magic and parcel magic were extremely dark.

Hermione shook her head, “You couldn’t be more wrong Harry. These arts are dark only if you use it in that way. Remember what McGonagall told us in our first year there is no light or dark magic

there is only magic and there is the intent that makes the magic light or dark.

“The dark arts or blood magic can be performed by very few wizards and witches who are powerful as blood magic involves blood as the basis of magic and for the dark arts more power is required in the spells; also the type of spells that are cast, are cast slightly differently from ordinary spells and both requires extensive cleansing afterwards. It is only when you don’t do the required cleansing that the dark arts and the blood magic can harm the caster. That is why it is not taught commonly and is not encouraged by everyone.”

“Wow Hermione when did McGonagall say all that? Well, I certainly feel very relieved now.” Harry told her dazed at her memory and very relieved at the information that his gifts would not classify him as dark.

“What gifts did you receive?” she held out her parchment and Harry saw that she had runic magic, animagus, potions and charms.

“Great Hermione.” He smiled at her and then as Harry was about to use his wand to inflame the parchments, Hermione stopped him. “Don’t do any magic Harry till we can get to the Room of Requirement and test out your strength, okay?”

Harry nodded his head as she burned the parchments and left saying she would return his cloak in the morning. Harry woke up just after breakfast the next day and ran to the Great Hall. All the professors were there and so was Hermione.

He sat down and started piling up on his plate and soon was eating to give Ron a run for his money. Hermione smiled at him. “Come on, we have work to do. How do you feel today?”

“Very light and very fit, amazing really.” Harry told her smiling.

“Okay finished? Come on, let us go the Room of Requirement and check out your strength.”

They went to the Room of Requirement and this time Hermione walked to and fro and soon they entered a room that looked fortified. “I have also set alarms and so when Dumbledore comes anywhere

near us there will be alarms and this time follow my lead if I say something sensitive.”

Harry nodded his head and Hermione asked him to start with the very first charm they had learnt *wingardium leviosa*.

Harry pointed his wand at a feather the room had provided and said, “*Wingardium leviosa*.”

The feather went zooming up and hit the ceiling with a force that made Harry blink and Hermione squeal with delight. “Oh this is great Harry. Now start with the same spell,” she told him frequently consulting a huge book she had, “try the same spell and till you are able to get it up gently, without rushing it.”

Now Harry had to do the exact opposite. Instead of trying numerous times to get it right, he had to try numerous times to make the magic that seemed to be singing along his entire body and rushing with great force to stop and come slowly and less fiercely.

The levitating spell alone took an hour and both Harry and Hermione were exhausted. They decided to take some rest till lunch and then come and try out again.

They walked out and made sure to be seen walking in the sprawling gardens talking softly about how they would escape detection and go over to Gringotts.

“I can’t believe Ron, Ron who came with us to the Department of Mysteries would take money for spying on you and Ginny, Ginny was going to try and lure you this year? How could they? Has she forgotten about how you saved her life in the Chamber? And she repays you like this?” Hermione was very angry as she spoke about what Harry had shown her in the Room of Requirement for the first time. Harry still could not get over Ron’s betrayal.

“I really don’t know Hermione. I had thought he saw beyond all that and while we had our fights and sulks, we were friends through and through. Now, it does not look like that, though. I never looked at Ginny that way and she has another thought coming if she thinks she

can be my girlfriend.” He said all the bitterness he had pushed inside pouring out of him.

“I really, really liked Ron you know,” Hermione told him, her voice very low and pained. “I really liked him so much.”

Harry looked at her aghast. “Merlin, I am so sorry Hermione. I never suspected anything and I am so sorry.”

She looked up at him angry and puzzled, “Why are you sorry Harry? It is he who has to repent, not you. Not you at all.” She shook her head at him reassuring him she wasn’t upset with him in any way.

“Er, because I told you, no I showed you, I am sorry,” he was cut off as Hermione turned to glare at him.

“You don’t get to apologize for his mistakes or for his stupidity and having known all this had you just let me be and not help you; you would not have been my friend. So don’t do that Harry. I cannot lose you too.” Her eyes were bright with unshed tears as they went inside hand in hand to have their lunch. After lunch they went to the Room of Requirement and started again.

This set the tone for the next week and Harry was only now getting a hold of his power when he suddenly remembered the wandless lumos he cast on his wand when the dementors had attacked him at Privet Drive.

When he told Hermione she had squealed and had started him off on wandless magic. Again they started slow and with the levitation spell and they had decided to work their way through.

It was another three days before Harry got the concept of wandless magic and Hermione was ready to beat him with a club, when the total frustration of not being able to levitate a feather coursed through him making the feather go up for a second before it fell flat.

Once he had done that he was jubilant and started earnestly, listening to Hermione about the theory and getting a hang of it and started casting basic first year spells for very short times.

They were very careful to mingle and also talk a bit about Ron and kept the conversation at normal levels. Hermione also made him read Occlumency and Legilimency openly, reading along with him, knowing that no one would ask anything as Harry was most likely doing this to assuage his grief. She was right and Dumbledore never came near them.

Harry found that reading and understanding everything came very easily to him and now he was able to comprehend the phrase, 'clear your mind' better. Hermione told him that Harry needed books from the basics to the advanced for the other gifts and they should be very careful while getting it.

They had been to the Room of Requirement to find the best books available on all of his gifts and had made a comprehensive list of names of books and authors. Harry also decided to study aura scanning and how to see them without casting the spells as he had the gift.

He started concentrating hard on his classmates staring hard at them, inviting rather obscene comments and after a particularly lewd remark, he took his invisibility cloak and sat down in his common room whenever he had the time and practiced. The first aura he saw with the naked eye was that of a second year old girl that was pink in color. He was jubilant and practiced harder.

He found Snape always glaring at him or looking at him speculatively, but did not bother. He understood the basics of Occlumency and had a shaky shield in his mind and was forever strengthening it. He still not talk much and his thoughts when not occupied by the new purpose as he and Hermione had taken to calling their studies, went straight to Sirius and a feeling of sorrow and guilt would rip through him.

Hermione would try to keep him on track, but sometimes, the grief was too much and the loneliness very hard to bear. Still he had Hermione and he was terribly glad that he had one of his best friends with him at least. But she was not Sirius. She was not the father he had secretly thought Sirius would be, a parent to whom he could be

happy, sad, nasty even and downright rude when angry and still be loved.

In the ten days he had been there after the horror of the Department of Mysteries Harry had begun to see auras now and then, when he concentrated hard, had the basics of wandless magic firmly in his grasp and was also going through Occlumency and had started practicing Legilimency first on Hermione and then on random people, taking extreme care to see that he would never peep into their private thoughts.

Legilimency came far easier to Harry than Occlumency, which he still struggled with not able to completely close his mind and shut of his rather turbulent emotions.

Two days before they were about to leave, Harry was called to the Headmaster's office by Dumbledore. He was accompanied by an impassive McGonagall and they reached the office, and went inside to face a smiling Dumbledore and a scowling Snape who was sitting there glaring at him.

End of Chapter – 3

Chapter – 4

This was the ultimate test of his acting abilities, Harry knew as he stepped inside and glared slightly at Snape, a glance that drew a smile from Dumbledore. Snape was glaring right back at him. McGonagall was looking very impassive and a touch nervous, though the nervousness did not show unless you knew her well.

“Hello Harry, how have you been?” Dumbledore asked him softly, looking at him intently and smiling gently at him.

“Fine Sir,” Harry mumbled, feeling his heart pounding in his chest as he tried to look as always.

“You have been learning Occlumency all by yourself, Harry?”

“Yes Sir. I am trying to learn so that I don’t make any more mistakes.” Dumbledore smiled at that remark and then spoke very seriously to Harry.

“Harry, Voldemort is beginning to come out more and more in the open. His plans to operate in secrecy, as the Ministry had refused to accept his return have now been nullified as almost everyone saw him in the Ministry the other day. He will come after you and try his best to kill you as you have been the thorn that has refused him the status of the most powerful wizard. He can hardly be one when he is defeated by a one year old baby and then subsequently by you almost every year since you started Hogwarts.”

Harry nodded his head still careful not to look at Dumbledore in the eyes. Dumbledore laughed gently.

“Harry I am not going to read your mind. You may look at me.” Harry blushed but looked down and did not answer.

“Harry I have taken a step to ensure that you will be trained adequately for the war that seems inevitable. These holidays you will spend only a week with the Dursleys, the rest of the time you will spend in training.”

Harry beamed convincingly. "Yes Sir."

Dumbledore did not beam back. "Yes Harry. But the training will not be at Hogwarts. I have asked professor Snape to take care of your training in defensive and offensive magic as well as Occlumency and,"

CRASH Harry had stood up furious and almost shouted at his Headmaster.

"I won't do it Sir. That is equal to handing me over to Voldemort or worse. It was because of him I lost, lost," Harry stopped there unable to go on, his hands clenched and every line of his body screaming in rage.

"I am equally glad that I am blessed with this glorious opportunity to train the Golden Boy-who-Lived." Snape told him acidly before Dumbledore signaled him to stop.

"Harry I expect you to be sensible and matured. A lack of both will definitely cost us as it has in the recent past." Snape and McGonagall winced visibly as Harry stood stunned at the low blow. He did not say a word more in protest. He stood there for a long moment visibly controlling his emotions.

"Is that all or is there more you would like to inform me about professor?" he asked softly, without looking at Dumbledore.

"No Harry." Harry turned and left the room without saying a word to McGonagall and Snape.

"How could you Albus? Have you forgotten that it is not even two weeks since he has lost the only family that he had left? I had thought better of you Albus." McGonagall was as acid as Snape had been a few minutes ago and she looked disappointed as she glared at Albus.

"Harry has to learn Minerva," Dumbledore said heavily and sadly. "He cannot afford childish stand offs, that could cost him heavily. It was his reluctance to learn from Severus that cost him Sirius. I had to remind him so that he would not make the same mistake this time

and lose young Mr. Weasley or Miss. Granger. That would truly devastate him. Believe me Minerva, I truly had no choice.”

McGonagall scoffed at him. “That may be Albus, but for you speak so uncaringly when he is still grieving does not speak well for you. Now I hope you will excuse me.” She did not wait for an answer and went out swiftly leaving Dumbledore to sigh heavily.

“She will understand,” he shook his head and smiled at Severus and chatted for some time about Voldemort and then dismissed him and calling Fawkes, slowly petted him, thinking deeply.

Harry stormed out of the Headmaster’s office and ran to the Room of Requirement where Hermione was waiting for him anxiously. One look at his face and her face fell as well. She waited as Harry threw himself on the sofa next to her still shaking with anger and sadness that was tearing him apart.

It was almost fifteen minutes before he was able to speak to Hermione and told her briefly what Dumbledore had said. She was equally horrified.

“I know I am to blame, but for him to say so... I felt so bad Hermione.”

“Of course you are not to blame. It is all of them who are to blame. Dumbledore for not telling you about Voldemort and that he was capable of planting false visions in your head, for going away from the School and you leaving you alone, Snape for not teaching you Occlumency properly and not stressing the importance of leaning that art so much more, Harry. All of these gits are to blame, not you.”

She held him tightly as he shook with so many emotions and slowly he calmed down and turned to her with a look in his eyes she could not decipher. “Well I am going to show these people Hermione. Snape, Dumbledore, Rrr...Ron, Ginny, Moody, Remus and all of them, I will take care of Voldemort and I will try to live after that, or if I can’t at least take him down with me as I go and none of them will touch a pie from my account for any purpose other than what I specify.”

Hermione had tears flowing down her eyes as she looked at the boy who was her first friend and who had been so abused by everyone

and here he was still wanting to defeat Voldemort instead of just vanishing from the Wizarding World that had only bad things to offer him and live his life in peace.

“You will not be alone, Harry. I will be there right by your side and I am sure the Twins will also back you and so will Neville and Luna.”

He smiled at her all pushing all his sorrow and buried them deep inside him and started to practice again. He studied Occlumency with new fervor as Snape would probably start off with that as a welcome to Harry Potter.

The next two days went fast in a round of practice and to Dumbledore's and Snape's shock and McGonagall surprise, Harry became almost normal. He was quieter than usual but there was no sulking and no angry hissing to Hermione and no glaring at Dumbledore or Snape.

He never looked at the Head Table and made sure he never met Dumbledore or ran into Snape. When he did bump, only once into Dumbledore, he just muttered “sorry Sir” with a small smile and went on his way stopping Dumbledore at that place for almost two minutes wondering about Harry's sudden change.

Hermione had been very busy in the last two days and she had written several letters to her parents.

They said their good-byes to Hagrid and went to a compartment at the back and sealed the doors and then relaxed.

The train journey went off without a hitch, Neville and Luna knocked on their door after some time and all of them relaxed chatting about anything and everything. Neville seemed more confident and he had also struck up a friendship of sorts with Luna who seemed just the same, sitting with the Quibbler and making wired but sensible comments from time to time.

Harry waved to Hermione who was walking swiftly to where her parents were standing and hugging them she left. Harry saw his uncle standing there with his aunt and Dudley and he walked towards

them to find Lupin, Moody, Tonks and Arthur Weasley standing there to warn his uncle.

Harry did not say a word and he left with a small smile and a wave to all of them, not speaking anything to them. He got into the car and waited for about five minutes before he performed the first bit of wandless magic outside of the Room of Requirement.

He cast a mild compulsion charm at all three of them with a flick of his hand and asked his uncle at the same time, "Why don't we stop in London for tonight and leave for Privet Drive tomorrow morning. Dudley and I can explore London to day. We can leave early tomorrow morning." And waited with baited breath for what his uncle, aunt and Dudley would say to that.

"Hmm, while I hate to agree with you boy, your idea has merit. What do you say Petunia?" asked Mr. Dursley.

She nodded her head and turned to Harry, "You will not be coming with us. You will find your way around London and stay in a lodge or something? Vernon can you please give him a little money and you, boy, you will come to Privet Drive tomorrow morning all right?"

Vernon Dursley drove to a four star hotel and got down and handed a few pounds to Harry and told him to leave. Harry left the next second, dragging his trunk behind him till he came to a small alley. He flicked his hand and shrunk his trunk and put it into his robes and walking along called a taxi to take him as near as possible to The Leaky Cauldron.

Hermione was waiting there in a side alley next to The Leaky Cauldron with her parents and Harry put his invisibility cloak on and then Hermione walked inside The Leaky Cauldron to check if Moody or Dumbledore were there. Seeing the place almost empty, she signaled to Harry who came in with Hermione's mother and all of them went into Diagon Alley. There Harry once again flicked his hand and changed his hair to blond and another flick to change the shape of his glasses and he became unrecognizable.

Harry had practiced these charms wandlessly for the last so many days till he had perfected it. Now he was glad and he grinned as he

saw Hermione's envious look. "I am jealous of you Harry. How I wish I could do this."

He smiled at Hermione and all of them went to Gringotts. Harry went alone slightly away from the Grangers so that no one would question them about the strange boy with them. All of them entered Gringotts and Harry went to a goblin counter that was free and asked for the procedure to access his family vaults and take control of them as his parents and godfather was dead.

The goblin stared at him, "and who might you be to come here to ask about your family vaults?"

Harry went near the goblin knowing that Hermione was watching his back and would make sure that no one would come near this particular counter and spoke softly to the goblin. "My name is Harry James Potter and I have come to talk to you about my vaults in private and in secret. I am in disguise so that no one from the School or outside can recognize me."

The goblin had been silently listening to him and now got down and asked Harry to follow him. Harry looked back for a second towards Hermione and went with the goblin.

It took Harry to a small room where Harry found to his consternation that his glamour had fallen away. The gobbling looked at him and smiled, "the glamour would come back once you leave this room, now," flicking a finger and summoning a parchment, "please put a drop of blood on this parchment so that we can verify that you are indeed Harry Potter."

Harry nervously pricked his finger and put a drop of blood on the parchment and watched it spread on the parchment and saw his name appear on the parchment and heaved a sigh of relief. The goblin left the room asking Harry to wait and within a few minutes another older goblin came in and introduced itself as Pitot. It went and sat down behind a desk and two chairs that appeared miraculously and gestured Harry to sit down in front of it.

"Now what can I do for you Mr. Potter? Have you come for Mr. Black's will or for your inheritance?"

Harry stared at him in shock, "Mr. Black?"

"Yes Mr. Potter, Mr. Black's will have already come to us and we had already sent a letter requesting your presence before the end of this month. If you do not accept it, it would go to Mrs. Lestrange as the next of kin."

Harry saw red, his grief turning to rage. He stamped down on it, "Sir I would like to see and accept both and also would like to visit my vaults as well. Also," here Harry hesitated, "Will you tell anyone that I have been here or that I have accepted my inheritance and that of, of Mr. Black?"

The goblin shook its head. "No, Mr. Potter if you desire confidentiality, it is our duty to give it to you. You may not worry about it." Harry was very relieved as he heard those words and he made a note to firmly request the goblin to make his visit and his request confidential.

The goblin summoned the relevant papers and asked Harry to go through it and then sign at the marked places. Harry laboriously went through the whole thing and then signed the papers. The goblin then handed the wills of his parents and Sirius to Harry.

Harry looked at the wills of his parents and then with a small choked sound looked at that of Sirius. Both wills were very simple and pretty straightforward. The wills left everything to Harry, the money, the Head of House of Potter and Black and all properties. He signed the wills and accepted them.

The goblin handed two rings both made of gold bands and one with a red stone in the center and the other with a green stone set in the center. The red stone had the words 'P' carved elaborately on the surface while the green stone had a gracefully carved 'B' on it. Harry placed the too big Potter ring on his hand first and that pricked him and then glowed brightly for almost a minute before sizing down and snugly fitting him.

The Black ring also did the same and the goblin had asked Harry to wear the Black ring on the same finger as the Potter ring and both rings fused with each other and then promptly became invisible.

“They can be removed separately by just thinking of which ring you would like to remove and wear on another finger. They will also become visible for a few seconds if you want to show them to anyone. Otherwise they can never be revealed by any spell. This way of wearing is merely convenient.” Harry nodded feeling pleased that the rings would not show.

Harry then cleared his throat and started asking the questions that he had prepared with Hermione.

“Sir, Can I become emancipated?”

“You already are, Mr. Potter. The moment you signed the wills you became an emancipated wizard.”

“Then can I use my wand during the holidays without fear of underage sorcery?” Harry asked him, his eyes gleaming.

“Yes of course Mr. Potter. The spells are cast in a way that they will be automatically removed on your seventeenth birthday or when you become emancipated and no one will be any the wiser. But remember Mr. Potter, if you are in a place where there are spells to register magic performed then your wish to keep all this confidential will not materialize. I would advise you to never use your wand in your relatives’ home, yes Mr. Potter I know you live in a muggle area, but to use your wand in magical places, where no one will be able to deduct anything.”

Harry nodded his head thoughtfully at that. Who knew what type of spells Dumbledore had placed in and around Privet Drive. It would be better to be safe rather than to be sorry.

“Is there any way to access any money without coming here every time, both wizard and muggle money?” was the next query that Harry asked, “And can you get me a statement of the withdrawals of my account, both the main vaults and my trust vault?”

“Have you not been receiving statements Mr. Potter that we have been sending you monthly?” it asked its eyes gleaming with a slight shock and anger.

“No Sir, I have not and,” as the goblin was beginning to look furious, “I don’t want to take any action on anyone now, Sir, so please just tell me to whom have you been sending the statements and if I could get a copy now of all of them now?”

The goblin stared at Harry, “If you decide to take action then you must enlist our help to help you win against Mr. Dumbledore.” So it was Dumbledore who never informed him about the statements, thought Harry angrily as he nodded.

“Your trust vault, Mr. Potter has an amount of twenty million galleons that was created to last you till you finish School. After that you were to take over the Potter vaults and business that are worth about twenty billion galleons today. The Black wealth is about fifteen billion galleons and all of that belongs to you along with the extensive properties.

“All the properties are under the Fidelus and are well protected. This is a list of homes you have here in Britain and all you have to do is to think of that home and hold your ring and it will take you there. Of course since you have formally assumed the Head of the Houses of Potter and Black today you get control of everything”

There were about seven homes including Godric’s Hollow and Grimmauld Place. The other five seemed to be located all over Britain in very remote areas. There were three in Scotland, one in Ireland and one in England. Godric’s Hollow was in Wales and Grimmauld Place in London in England.

“Once you reach there you will have to key yourself in by placing a drop of your blood on the wards and then you may use spells to key in others you may wish to allow admittance into your homes.” Harry nodded once again, very bemused and shocked at the amount of wealth that belonged to him. No wonder Moody had told Albus to make sure the money would come under his control.

“Here is your statement for the last fifteen years. Out of the twenty million, hardly anything has been removed except your withdrawals and the School fees after you started Hogwarts.”

So Dumbledore had not paid them with his money. Harry felt just a small bit, very small bit better. He asked for a demand draft of a million pounds to be made to one Petunia Dursley, to be posted over to her on the day of his seventeenth birthday. He also asked the goblins to place No. 4, Privet Drive under the Fidelus on the day before his seventeenth birthday and to make him the secret keeper.

Then Harry took a money pouch that changed to a wallet when removed in the presence of muggles that would provide him with the amount of money he thought. The goblin also bound the wallet to him so that it would never get stolen and also equipped with a credit card that he could use in both worlds.

“Sir is there a way I can reach you in case of any doubt, how do I prepare a will and is there a way I can remove my money from my main vaults and not my trust vaults?”

“I will give you a secure pouch in which you may submit queries and I will get them immediately and attend to it. I have been conducting your affairs for many years now since your great-great-grandfather’s time and though I was not in charge of the Black accounts till now, after it has become yours; I have taken charge of it and am in the process of looking into it. Of course you may tell me anything you wish to do and I will have it done.

“To prepare a will all you need to do is to write it, date it and sign it and place a drop of your blood on it and specify at the end that it is your final will. That is all. You can remove money from any vault by thinking of that vault. If you think of your trust vault then the money will come from there, think of your main vaults or of the Black vaults and the money will come from there.”

Harry nodded his head and stood up, “Thank you Sir for everything. May I see the Black and the Potter main vaults now?” he asked his voice shaking as he thought of visiting his parents’ vaults and Sirius’s vaults.

The goblin too stood and smiled a rare thing, “I have yet to see someone so polite for someone so powerful, Mr. Potter. A rare combination.” It saw the panic in Harry’s eyes and laughed gently, if ever a goblin could laugh in the first place and gently at that.

"I told you the glamour falls away. I saw your true aura. Do not worry; all glamour will be on you once you leave the room. It is a pleasure to do business with you Mr. Potter and do not hesitate to approach me and by extension the goblins to assist you in any manner."

As Harry gaped at it not knowing what to say, the goblin smiled at his astonishment, "You have powerful enemies Mr. Potter," it said softly, "the Dark Lord alone would be too much, but from your visit here, it seems that you would have to wage a war against the establishment and the so called Light as well. So do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it. I am the part of the Goblin Council and I am given the authority to speak for all of us."

"Thank you so much Sir. Thank you." Harry was overwhelmed and it showed in his eyes as he shook hands awkwardly with the goblin and then both of them went down to the vaults. Harry's glamour came back the minute they stepped out and both of them walked swiftly to take a cart right down to the main Potter vaults.

The Potter vaults were situated in the bottom caves of the bank and Harry had an exhilarating cart ride with the goblin. At the entrance of the vault, that goblin asked Harry to prick his finger and place it on the circle indicated on the door. "There are no keys to these types of vaults, Mr. Potter only magical signature and blood."

Harry did as he said and the magic that came from the door froze him as it assessed his magical signature and blood and then the vault doors slowly opened. "I will stay right here and wait for you to come out Mr. Potter." The goblin told him and Harry stepped into his family vault.

The vault was huge and was divided into caverns that housed different items. There was a cavern that was very big and deep that housed a whole library and there was another that had only magical artifacts and yet another that had jewels and four others that had money and a small one that had wizard accessories that included wands, trunks, robes and other trinkets that had been placed over the ages and a lot of portraits.

Harry went to the huge cavern that housed the library and started looking through the books there. He picked up books on all subjects

that had been revealed as his gifts. Then he left the vault with about twelve books with him and met the goblin who had been standing patiently all the while.

The goblin then took Harry to the Black vault and Harry had to blink very hard to keep himself under control. He entered the vaults and to his surprise it was designed the same as his family vault. He took a walk around and picked up a few books on the Dark Arts and Blood Magic and walked out.

He intended to come back and look around leisurely later with Hermione; he knew she would drool at the sight of so many books, but now he wanted to do shopping in Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley. He left with the goblin and went up. There the goblin gave him the money pouch and the secure pouch to send queries to and statements from Gringotts and putting everything in order Harry left.

He met Hermione and her parents' in the main hall of Gringotts where they had been waiting anxiously and grinned at them, signaling them to follow him outside. There Harry used his wand and performed the first bit of magic as he added a glamour to Hermione and telling her parents' to wait in The Leaky Cauldron both of them left to shop.

Harry first dragged Hermione to the trunk shop and got himself a multi compartment trunk and a bottomless bag. Then they shopped for stationary, books and potions supplies and cauldrons, clothes and various other things.

Then Harry led the way into Knockturn Alley and went into Borgin and Burkes. "What may I do you?" soft words came from a corner where Borgin was coming out of the shadows.

"We are here to see books on the Dark Arts and also other artifacts." Hermione told him in a voice that dripped pure-blood and said don't ask questions.

Borgin was not impressed and he raised his eyebrows at both of them, "What Dark Books?"

"Listen, if you do not have dark books, please stop wasting our time. Come on Ruithe, let us go." They left and had actually closed the

door and were turning away with twin looks of disgust, when the door opened and Borgin softly beckoned them inside.

“One cannot be too careful now-a-days, Sir, Madame, please forgive me and follow me inside.” Harry and Hermione felt a sudden surge of excitement as they went inside and Borgin took them to a hidden staircase that led them up to the first floor that they had not seen or noticed before.

There Harry looked around stunned as he saw the books and artifacts that were filled from top to bottom in shelves that were neatly arranged. Hermione was actually drooling at all the books that were there and was itching to have a go at them.

They separated to look at the various books and artifacts and Harry slowly walked down the aisles looking and picking anything that caught his fancy. ***All You Need To Know About The Dark Arts, Blood Magic, The Art Of Shielding The Mind And the Art Of Probing The Mind, Runes What are they?***

Hermione had picked up about twenty books for herself and Harry had fourteen books added to his collection from the vault. As he turned the last corner, Harry caught sight of a book-case that was elaborately carved and had books inside it. It was about three feet in length and was about the same in width.

Harry tried to open it but could not and before he could ask Borgin what was inside, the man himself came to him, “That has been as long as I remember young Sir and I could not open the case and I tried in so many ways.”

On an impulse Harry asked him what the price was. “Well I really don’t know, but I will let you have it for a hundred galleons.” Borgin’s eyes were gleaming with greed.

“You must be crazy. I will give you twenty and that is only for the book case. Those books may be worth less for all you know and it is a very good price for the case.”

“What if the books are very worthy and valuable? There are about sixty to seventy books in there Sir. Make it an even fifty and you may

take it and that is final Sir.” He said hastily as he saw Harry opening his mouth to argue.

Harry considered only for a moment and then he nodded his head. The book case was beautiful and who knew the books could be very valuable for all he knew.

Harry shrunk the case and all the books that they had purchased, haggled over the prices for the other books and then finally left with an impressive collection of the Dark Arts, Blood magic and other books.

They walked out of Knockturn Alley and went into Diagon Alley and from there to The Leaky Cauldron where the Grangers were waiting for them. Harry and Hermione went out not waiting for the Grangers to join them and Hermione’s parents’ soon came out and followed them to a small alley outside The Leaky Cauldron.

Harry and Hermione removed all their glamour and un-shrunk the case and divided their respective books and Harry packed all of them into his new trunk and then went with the Grangers who dropped him in No.4, Privet Drive.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Granger, Mrs. Granger, Hermione,” was all he said before Hermione’s hand came and shut him up.

“It is a pleasure; lad, no need to worry and you only have to call if you need anything.” Mr. Granger told him chuckling at Hermione’s method of shutting him up and Mrs. Granger was nodding her head and smiling at Harry endorsing all that her husband had said.

“You must be very careful and make sure you use the parchment that will enable us to talk to each other.” Was all she had time to say before she caught sight of the Order who was waiting on the lawns of the Dursleys?

The entire Order was waiting for him at the Dursleys, looking anxious and then relieved as they saw him with the Grangers and then angry as they saw him with two trunks and many purchases.

Dumbledore came up to him first, "Are you all right Harry? All of us were so worried. Where were you?" Harry looked sick, tired and totally down as he answered in a low voice.

"Well, Sir it was entirely my fault. I wanted to look around London and I asked my uncle if we could, he agreed only he gave me some money and told me to look around by myself and return here by tomorrow morning. He dropped me off near The Leaky Cauldron and I wore my cloak and went inside and did some shopping there by wearing my big cloak that hid my face and afterward as I came into muggle London to take the bus, I thankfully ran into Hermione who was also finishing her shopping and going home. The Grangers offered to drop me here and ... I am sorry for all the trouble I caused."

Moody spoke to him then and Harry noticed Remus standing there and not saying anything to him and his shoulders sagged. "We could verify all this with your uncle, Potter."

"Why don't you and if I have been telling the truth will you give me a piece of candy for being a good boy?"

Moody stared at Harry as Harry glared back at him before turning to Dumbledore, "Sir, I am very tired and I doubt the Dursleys will be here till tomorrow, so may I be excused?"

"Potter where will you go? Have those idiots given you the keys to this house?" McGonagall asked him not minding the reproachful looks that Dumbledore gave her.

"Not to worry professor. I will sleep in the shed." Harry told her glad at least one person was there who was speaking up for him.

"In the shed?" she asked him incredulously.

Harry shrugged uncaringly. "Yeah, that is where I usually sleep, when they go away for the holidays. It is quite all right, professor."

McGonagall looked furious and for a brief second glanced at Snape who was yet to sneer or snipe. Dumbledore looked pained at this piece of information and the other Order members were shocked. Harry though had enough. He turned to the Grangers and Hermione

and thanked them for bringing him here and excusing himself from the Order he left to open the shed with the key he took from where it was hanging on the nail on the wall and went inside as the Order members started apparating to Grimmauld Place.

Dumbledore waited only to thank the Grangers and then he too left with only Mundungus Fletcher standing guard.

End of Chapter -4

Chapter – 5

Harry went inside a conflict of emotions raging in him, sadness as he saw that Remus had not even attempted to speak to him, anger at the way Dumbledore and the Order had come to see what had happened to him. No doubt they were scared that if anything happened to Harry then Dumbledore would be left with no one to sacrifice their lives for his so called noble ideals, he thought as he put his trunk down, and bitterness welling up in his heart.

All the others had families, people and friends who cared for them. Not like Harry who had no body and who was only a means to an end. Well no one except Hermione and he must make sure he did not push her or frighten her away by leaning too much on her.

He sighed and started taking out his things and removing them from the covers. He had bought almost a whole wardrobe of clothes, mostly robes and some jeans and tee shirts from the muggle section.

He put his clothes away carefully in one compartment and then put his books away into another and then he unpacked his old trunk and put the shrunken firebolt, invisibility cloak, photo album and his other precious things in one compartment.

The Grangers had bought some food for him while they were waiting in The Leaky Cauldron and Harry thankfully ate it after unpacking everything, except the book case. Deciding to see about the book case the next day, Harry fell asleep, exhausted and did not wake up till the Dursleys came home the next morning.

Harry woke up and went inside casting a notice me not charm wandlessly on him and marveling at the way the Dursleys did not bother to shout at him or ask him where he had been and how he had come home.

He went to his room and kept his things away and went down and removed the notice me not charm and watched his uncle's eyes bulging out of his head and his face purpling in anger and quickly cast the harmony charm on his uncle, aunt and cousin one by one and

watched with fascination as the air went out of his uncle and he smiled at Harry.

Harry felt nauseous and almost wanted to go back to the shouting that was so much better than his uncle Vernon smiling at him but decided to keep quiet to check the time span of his spell when it was not removed.

His aunt requested him to do some work, starting with breakfast, very politely though and Harry grinned to himself as he started the preparations.

Apparently the charm did not cure her desire to make Harry work hard, though it would make her stop yelling and throwing pans at him. Well that was an improvement and Harry got going.

After breakfast, the charm still holding, Harry had the first morning in living memory that did not include shouting and yelling and grunting and sniping. It felt good and Harry decided to look up many household charms to make his work easier and finish faster so that he could escape upstairs and do some studying.

He went to his room later after he had finished all his chores and started with Occlumency and Legilimency first. He read a good portion of the text the whole day getting up only to the disturbingly pleasant voice of his aunt calling him to do this and that and after dinner Harry sat down to do the practical of what he had learned the whole day.

After another hour he got up giving it up as a bad job as the shields he had tried so hard to build were shaky at best and he had to hope Snape, Dumbledore or Voldemort would be a gentleman and not peep into his mind and allow it to remain private. He grimaced as he realized how ridiculous that was.

Well as his Occlumency would not become stronger than that, Harry decided to do the required practice everyday and concentrate on his wandless magic and to stop whispering the spells as he flicked his hand or fingers. He also decided to study the Dark Arts and Blood magic as well as Parsel magic and his other studies. He only hoped

he would be more successful in them than he had been at Occlumency.

Legilimency was easy for Harry to understand as he had practiced with Hermione in the Room of Requirement and was moderately successful. He went to sleep that night a bit disgruntled about his lack of success in closing his mind, determined to do better in his other studies the next day.

The next one week passed much in the same way his first day had. Harry did not leave the house and he concentrated on his wandless magic and studied his first books on Blood magic, runes and the Dark Arts. He also used the time he was working, doing his chores for the Dursleys to clear his mind and also think deeply about issues that plagued the Wizarding World and also about the Order, Voldemort and his own role in everything.

The week rolled by and Harry received a short note from Snape that only said, '*Coming at four tomorrow. Be ready.*' Harry wrote Hermione telling her he had received confirmation from Snape and he would be leaving the next day. Harry had until then completely forgotten about the book case that he had placed inside his cupboard so that the Dursleys would not see it and take it away from him. He saw it as he opened the cupboard to pack things that he had kept there, things he did not use often.

He took out the book case in the night and decided to see how to open it without harming himself. He tried all the conventional ways at first and then tried wandless spells of '*alahamora*' and other unlocking spells that he had learned in the past few weeks.

Nothing worked and then he remembered that some magical locks needed blood to open. Harry did not think further as it could have been very dangerous, especially if the books inside were charmed to attack. He would later be soundly scolded by Hermione and look very sheepish as angry words would appear on the parchment. At the moment though, he pricked his finger and placed a drop of blood on the case muttering the spell to open the book case.

As he did not use a wand to open it in a conventional way, Harry did have a doubt whether this would work but he decided to try anyway.

The drop of blood fell from his hand on to the book case and for a moment there was nothing and then the whole book case glowed and the doors softly opened.

Harry was thrilled, but very careful as he put his hand on the first book on the top shelf and slowly ran down all the books seeing if they would bite, like Hagrid's monster books or would vibrate as Black magic books would like he had read in his introduction to the Dark Arts that specified the difference between Dark and Black magic.

There were more than sixty to seventy books there as the book case began to expand to twice its breath and length. There were more than a hundred books there and all of them seemed to be very old. Suddenly there was a parchment that appeared in Harry's hand. Unnerved Harry read it, his hands shaking.

To whomsoever who is the worthy recipient of this book case,

My name is Artemis Canogahn. This is the year 869. I am living in Ireland and I am an expert in the Dark Arts. This is a collection of rare books that I have compiled together from many manuscripts. Till date I have yet to find a worthy soul of bequeathing my legacy that are my books. If you have managed to open this book case then know you are an exceptional witch or wizard as the enchantments I have placed are massive but the unlocking is very simple. It is a Dark Arts spell combined with Blood Magic that will read your magic the moment you spill a drop of blood on the case.

These books contain great knowledge of the ancient arts and the important branches of magic that are prevalent today, like spell casting, ancient elemental magic, runes and Parsel magic along with the Dark Arts and Blood Magic and Healing. The fact that you have opened states that you have all these branches as your inheritance gifts or that your magic is compatible with all these branches and you are pure enough not to abuse these branches of magic for manipulation.

Read these books extensively and follow the rules laid out in them diligently. The world is yours.

Artemis Canogahn.

Harry sat back and for the next half hour all he did was to stare at the case. He had never even heard of this name, not that it said much, but this was amazing. All these books belonged to a period before Hogwarts and may be even before the Founders' were born. Harry was thrilled and he wrote Hermione and after scolding him for being rash, she too, was much exited.

The rest of the night till about three in the morning, Harry aided by Hermione went through the entire books one by one and then packed everything and then shrunk the book case and Harry placed a notice me not charm on his door and went to sleep. He was not disturbed till eleven, when he came down to find all the Dursleys gone somewhere.

He helped himself to a meal and then cleaned the place and cooked lunch just as his aunt came in. Harry hurriedly cancelled the charm and his aunt immediately turned to him only to find that he had finished all his chores. She frowned at him as if unable to understand how she could have forgotten all about him and after lunch went up still frowning.

Harry went up, all ready and packed and waited patiently if very nervously for Snape to arrive.

One week earlier after seeing Harry was safe...

The Order had apparated from the Dursleys residence to Grimmauld Place and there Molly Weasley was waiting impatiently as was Ron, Ginny and the Twins. As the Order came in one by one looking very uncomfortable and rather sad, Molly was scared.

She truly loved Harry as her very own and she had wanted Dumbledore to send Harry to her for the holidays and she had made Bill her eldest child approach Dumbledore and ask him if he could train Harry. Dumbledore though had refused smilingly. She had always felt like McGonagall that Dumbledore was very harsh on a child who already had too much on his shoulders and now especially after Sirius.

She thought of Remus and her face fell into a frown. She had ranted to her husband and had even shouted at Remus. She remembered the way she had yelled at Remus and Tonks the next day.

All of them had gathered for lunch at Grimmauld Place, Remus, Tonks, Snape, Albus, Moody, McGonagall, Shacklebolt and her family except Ron and Ginny who were resting in their rooms and Charlie who was in Romania.

She had waited until all of them had finished with their lunch and then had taken Remus to the cleaners. "I really do not know how you can say that Harry was responsible for Sirius's death, Remus. You of all people know how he regarded Sirius, he had put Sirius in place of his parents' and you just come up with this."

Albus had tried to calm her, but had not succeeded. She had looked steadily at Remus, who had at least the grace to flush. Tonks had bristled angrily but she had simply glared Tonks down as well.

"If Harry ever came to know that you felt like this Remus I really do not think you could ever breach the gap and I suppose you think that James, Sirius and Lily would be very pleased with the way you are treating their child." Remus had looked up in horror as the remark she had intended to hurt, hit home.

"Molly, all that you say is true but the wolf inside me howls for Sirius. For nearly thirteen years I lived in the belief that Sirius had betrayed and after he came back to me he was snatched away. He would not have ventured out had it been anyone other than Harry, and he would have not died if he had not ventured out. I know I am wrong, the conflict is tearing me inside and I am working on it, believe me."

Molly had snorted, but had to back down after giving him a piece of her mind, as she knew the wolf in him was in mourning and to an extent he could not help it, but he need not have said it so openly.

Now she was almost jittery with worry as the Order members apparated in and silently went and helped themselves to the coffee, tea and biscuits she had prepared.

Arthur came in and he went straight to Molly and hugged her, and told her in low tones what had happened. When she heard that Harry spent whole holidays when he was younger in the shed and alone she was furious.

"What is happening here Albus? I feel we are coming close to the side we are fighting," she was cut off by Albus who raised incredulous eyes to her.

"Molly you cannot mean that, really."

"Of course I do. What kind of people have we left an orphan boy with? Because that is what Harry is and just because he has no one to stand up for him and no one to talk for him, we treat him like garbage and on top of that we expect him to save us as well?" she was equally incredulous as she answered Dumbledore.

"Well Sirius also left him there..." Dumbledore broke off as McGonagall interrupted him, "of course he did. We all did because we thought he was safe there. Safe from the death eaters maybe, but is he safe from his relatives Albus? What kind of people are they if they can leave a small boy who was probably seven, eight years old or maybe even younger for a few weeks or even a few days to fend for him self while they enjoy a holiday? I wonder what else they have subjected him to." McGonagall was her most scathing as she was almost shaking with anger.

Dumbledore was the picture of sorrow and he was surprised and worried as well. If Harry had been treated like this had he already gone dark? He looked briefly at Moody who was also looking very concerned and turned to calm Molly and McGonagall as best as he could. He was not very successful though.

All of them were uncomfortable with what they had witnessed and Ron and Ginny shared a look as they realized where the Order had been and what they were talking about and slowly the Order went on to discuss other things, though Harry's statement and the implications of how he must be treated was disturbing all of them.

Remus was the worst affected as he knew if it had been Sirius, Dumbledore or not, safety or not, he would have rescued Harry from

that. Harry was being treated like he was treated in the Wizarding World and Remus bent his head in shame. But the damage had already been done. He had seen the brief glance Harry had thrown his way and he realized he had been no better than any other wizard or witch who was oblivious to the burdens Harry had to bear from since he was fifteen months old.

Harry was waiting for Snape to come and take him away from the Dursleys. At half past three, he took his trunk and came down to find his aunt sitting in the drawing room, sipping a cup of tea. He told her he would be going away today and would not return until next year.

“Next year you will turn seventeen won’t you?” she asked him stiffly.

He nodded, “I will come here for a week or two perhaps and then leave for good. You will not see me later.”

“Good.” She said, making Harry’s lips curl sarcastically as he nodded too.

Harry sat on his trunk and waited for four. Sharp at four the bell rang. His aunt stiffened in displeasure and a little bit of fear as Harry went to open the door. Snape was standing there, his lips curling in total disdain at Harry, Harry’s aunt, Harry’s aunt’s home, Harry’s trunk and just about everything that his sharp eyes took in at a glance.

Harry glared at him fiercely and went inside and nodding to his aunt, dragged his trunk outside and followed Snape to the end of the road.

“I am going to apparate us to my cottage. Take your trunk in your hand.” Snape told Harry softly and no sooner had Harry picked up his trunk than they were gone.

Harry landed in a heap as he looked at Snape who took his hand off Harry’s shoulder and brushed off the non – existent dirt from his robes and looked at Harry raising his eye brows.

“You couldn’t have told me before we left?” Harry snarled at Snape as he got up.

“Why I did tell you Potter, I cannot help it if you are slow to understand things.” He replied smoothly, “Now are you coming or are you going to stand here arguing?”

Harry gritted his teeth and walked behind him. He had been with Snape for only five minutes and he was already foaming at the mouth. He had another month and three weeks to go before he would be free of the git. He shook his head and tried to look around, but they were really standing in the middle of nowhere. Behind them was a huge lake and there were hills beyond them. All of it looked very wild and extremely beautiful.

They would have walked for a minute, when Snape stopped, Harry almost bumping into him. “Give me your hand, Potter. I need to key you into the wards.”

Harry silently held out his hand and Snape flicked his wand and took Harry’s hand and placed it on the wards that buzzed loudly as they registered his magic and then Snape went into the wards and Harry followed him to see a very small cottage that stood a little away. Snape did not look back as he walked to the door and flicked his wand along with a long chant and the door opened.

The cottage was actually a big room that had the kitchen straight ahead of him on one side, a small table with two chairs near the kitchen space, must be the dining table Harry thought, two small single sofas with a center table in between the sofas and two doors on the left and two windows on the right. The cottage was warm inside even though Snape had opened the windows with his wand the moment he had opened the door. Next to the kitchen there was another door, must be the way to the kitchen gardens Harry thought.

“You will not be able to leave the wards Potter, whatever happens, do you hear me? So do not try unless you want to be roasted.” Snape informed him going inside and removing his outer robes and hanging them on the pegs to Harry’s left. Harry muttered something that could be taken as a yes; at least Snape took it as such and hanging his robes turned to meet him.

“This cottage is completely warded, that means you may do as much magic inside as you want, no one would detect it. There is only one

bedroom and as that is mine, Potter, you will sleep here. I will transfigure a bed for you as well as pillows and other things. There are no elves so you will do the cooking for both of us and you will take care of your clothes as well."

Harry simply shook with rage, "If you really think I am going to cook and clean after you, you have another thought coming. If you make me do these things, I will, I will poison you." He finished desperately, wondering what the hell he had got himself into.

Sleep in the drawing room, cook and clean for Snape, Harry simply spluttered with rage. Snape however was very cool even in the face of Harry poisoning him.

"You do not realize Potter how alone we are. I have sealed the wards, which means you may not leave until I say so. This place is mine and until today no one has ever come here. So no one will be able to find this place and I hope you do as I say or I will wait for a week's time and simply tell Dumbledore you do not obey and he will ask you to train with Moody. In that one week I will of course punish you as I see it fit for wasting my time and being disobedient."

Snape watched with a frown as a peculiar expression came over Harry's face at the mention of working with Moody. He tucked it away in a corner of his mind to examine it later.

Snape had been shocked when Remus had spoken what he did at the Order meeting and Minerva's plea and her revelation that Harry had not breathed a word to anyone about what he had seen in the pensieve and had taken Black to task caused him to re-examine the Boy-who-Lived. When he had seen Harry's interaction with Dumbledore and Moody, with whom he had been deliberately rude, Snape knew there was more to Harry than what he had believed.

He had decided then to push the boy as far as Harry would go and see what made him tick and if he was on the up as Minerva had said, Snape was willing to work with him and help him to take down the evil maniac. But first he had to know Harry, trust him and also make sure Harry would trust him.

Harry was frothing at the mouth as he heard the rules and after he heard Snape telling him what would happen if Snape went back to the Order saying he had failed with Harry, Harry knew being with Snape was the lesser of the two evils. So he had swallowed his anger and had nodded his head stiffly.

Snape was shocked. So Potter chose him over Moody. He wondered what that meant. He turned away and conjured a bed in the hall in one corner, and then curtains, a table and a chair.

"I will be back in half an hour; you may unpack, refresh yourself and make some tea for us. The bathroom is through that door. You share it with me. There are two doors and if one of us is inside the other door is automatically sealed. Be ready in half an hour." Snape strode inside and shut his door with a bang.

Harry fumed as he turned and stomped away to what would be his room from now on until the end of these miserable holidays. He dumped his trunk by his bed and went to wash his hands and face in the kitchen sink and started making tea.

He supposed his space was better than his broom cupboard but definitely not up to the second bedroom in the Dursleys. He smiled grimly to himself as he worked, that even the Dursleys was better than something.

Harry soon had a pot of tea and some biscuits he had found in the surprisingly well stocked pantry and removed them and placed them on a tray and took them to the small dining table that was meant for two as there were two chairs placed opposite each other.

Snape came striding in as if on cue and sat down in one sofa and gestured Harry to sit in the other. Harry poured the tea and handed it to Snape and waited. Snape raised his eyebrows surprised Harry had not poured tea for himself and silently gestured to Harry to have the tea.

Harry poured a cup of tea and sipped it nervously. All the while Harry had been fuming he had also been thinking, thinking that he should not anger Snape to an extent it would mean Moody or Dumbledore himself.

A sadness went through him as he realized Snape with his sniping and insulting of not only Harry but his father and Sirius as well, was better than Moody, Dumbledore or even the Weasleys, while Harry did know the others were not involved, his mind was now not in a state to deal with any of them as it would mean dealing with Ron and Ginny who might start working on him right away and Harry knew he would definitely snap and let the cat out the bag.

“If you have finished thinking and putting your mind to good use, Potter, perhaps you will be so kind to apply that working mind of yours and listen to your schedule that you will be following from today?” Snape asked him sarcastically, glaring at him a little.

Harry raised startled eyes to Snape and blushed a second later as what Snape told him registered. He nodded silently; vowing, he would do all Snape said and do it silently so that there would be no chance for Snape to belittle his father and Sirius or turn him over to Dumbledore.

Snape was astonished at Harry’s compliance not that it showed on his face, he looked as inscrutable as ever. Instinct told him that there was more to all this and he decided to talk to Minerva and try to make sense of all this.

Thinking deeply, he set down his cup that he had been slowly sipping from, surprised to find the tea very good and looked straight at Harry.

End of Chapter – 5

Chapter – 6

Snape stared at Harry as Harry put his head down and made sure Snape would not be able to see into his head and waited for Snape to begin. Snape did not say a word for almost five minutes.

Harry frowned and looked up at Snape to find Snape frowning back at him. Seeing Snape's eyes staring at him, Harry quickly looked elsewhere, flushing slightly and Snape realized at last what Harry was doing. He was avoiding Snape seeing into Harry's mind. He almost smiled and cleared his throat. This summer with Harry Potter was going to be interesting.

"Your schedule is right here, Potter. The time now is five. You will start your schedule from six today. I have written everything here." Snape handed the sheet to Harry who took it with a lot of trepidation.

Daily schedule

Wake up 5.00 am

Theory 5.30 am to 7.30 am

Preparing breakfast 7.30am to 8.00 am

Theory 9.00 am to 12 noon

Preparing lunch 12 noon to 1.30 pm

Preparation 1.30 pm to 4.00 pm

Practical 4.00 pm to 7.00 pm

Preparing dinner 7.00 pm to 8.30 pm

Preparation 9.00 pm 11.00 pm

"The theory and the practical will be what I specify on that day or the day before. Do you have any doubts, if you do, ask them now." Harry shook his head as he looked at the schedule with dismay.

"Then you will prepare for a practical on Occlumency and Legilimency at six today." Snape got up and went to his bedroom.

"Sir," Harry called out to him as he opened the door and Snape turned around impatiently, "What now Potter?"

Harry swallowed his own anger at Snape's snarl, "Sir, I won't do Occlumency and Legilimency till I have prepared and built a shield in my mind."

Snape slowly walked into the room, his eyes boring into Harry's face. "Look at me." He told Harry softly.

Harry stubbornly looked down and was shocked when Snape came very close to him and put a long finger under his chin and lifted Harry's face up.

Harry locked his eyes with Snape only for a second, before, he wrenched his face away from Snape and stepped back, looking down again. "Sir, please," Harry started in a low voice, "let me study my books that I have bought from Diagon Alley and build up my shields. Then I will take Occlumency lessons with you. Please give me that much time."

Harry hated himself at that time, sheesh! He thought disgusted with himself. He was reduced to begging Snape. But he really had no choice as Snape would see everything the first time he poked into his mind and Harry shuddered at the consequences of that action. He would have to agree to anything to avoid lessons on Occlumency till he developed stronger walls.

"You will take these lessons from me Potter. Be ready at six." Snape walked swiftly and went into his room and shut the door. Harry stared at the door in anger, fear and desperation and then whirled around and went to his trunk and removed the parchment and closing the curtains around him and casting silencing spells and privacy spells, started writing to Hermione praying she would respond.

Hermione, I am in a mess. Snape has told me he will test me on Occlumency at six today. That's right six hardly half an hour away. I am so agitated I really don't know what to do. I have begged him and

I have pleaded with him, saying that I need the time to study the theory and also to build up stronger shields before I can be tested on them, but Snape won't listen. I was so polite with him, Hermione. Really. I requested him and he just would not agree. Please, help.

Harry stopped there when he realized he was repeating himself and waited for an answer that would solve the mess he was in. He closed his eyes as he was waiting in an attempt to calm his mind and build up his shields and strengthen them.

A minute later he opened his eyes to see the parchment had only his note on it. He sighed and closed his eyes again, trying to meditate and get his mind that just would not listen into some semblance of order. Three minutes later he opened his eyes and saw her neat handwriting beginning to appear.

Merlin, Harry how awful. At six today means there is hardly any time to plan. Calm your mind and think of all the damage that could occur if Snape caught hold of your memories. We still are not sure of his loyalties and also if he will cover for us. Till we do it is better to be careful. Just think that whatever Snape may see, he should not witness the memories of the last three weeks.

*Just keep that clear in your mind and you will be fine. **Do not antagonize him Harry.** He may slip veritaserum into your tea or food without your knowledge and make you spill your darkest secrets to him. Be careful and Harry, you can do it. I have faith in you. I will not write now as I want you to meditate and be ready for him. Bye Harry. Till later.*

Harry stared at the note in dismay even as he knew what Hermione was saying was the truth. Veritaserum, Merlin that would be horrifying, Harry thought with a shudder as he imagined the questions Snape would ask him with a sneer on his greasy face.

Harry carefully put the parchment away and sat down on his bed and started meditating. He closed his eyes and started placing memories of the basilisk, the graveyard, the Department of Mysteries and other memories of his School years and his home life or rather the lack of it at the front. While these memories were horrible and distressing for

Harry they were nowhere near the level of fear he was feeling in the pounding of his heart if the other memories came up to the fore.

Sharp at six Snape called him sharply.

“Potter! Come on now. It is time.” Harry sighed angrily and then immediately regretted it and tried to calm himself as he knew being angry before or during Occlumency would only make it easier for Snape to penetrate into his mind.

He got up and flicked his wand to open the curtains and walked towards Snape. Snape was standing, his wand in his hand and ready to cast the Legilimens spell on Harry.

Harry stood across him nervously prepared to fight his way if Snape would even touch the edge of his memories that he did not want Snape or indeed anyone to see.

“Sit down.” Snape told him sourly and he stood as Harry sat down gingerly, his wand in his hand prepared to cast anything short of the unforgivables at Snape.

“To close your mind Potter you must clear it first,” Harry looked at him in bewilderment as he realized that Snape was talking and not attacking, Snape glared at him, “Are you paying attention, Potter for I dislike to repeat myself unless you are an ignorant and a fool who cannot understand?” he sneered his eyebrows raised questioningly at Harry.

Harry flushed angrily as so many retorts came to his mind. Only the threat and fear of veritaserum held it off and he swallowed heavily and nodded his head. “Yes.”

“Yes what?” Snape asked him his expression dark and forbidding as he looked at Harry with anger.

Harry was puzzled at the question until he remembered the Occlumency lessons of fifth year and he flushed again. “Yes Sir.” He said in a low voice.

Snape began to pace the room as he talked softly "Well, Occlumency is the art that teaches you to completely close your mind against outside influences. People who know the art of Legilimency can look into another's mind and see and remove thoughts. If the Legilimens is exceptional wizard or witch, then they can peer into another's mind without the knowledge of the other and they can plant false memories like the Dark Lord did."

Harry gasped as he looked at him panic shining in his eyes, "Can anyone look into my mind without my knowledge?" Merlin how awful was Snape trying to say he and Dumbledore could actually read his mind without his knowledge?

Snape snorted and sneered. "Why? What are you hiding Potter?" he asked Harry as he watched Harry very closely and saw him almost shake in fear and blush madly.

"I, Sir, I just, no Sir I am hiding nothing. I just don't like anyone and everyone to peep into my mind without my knowledge." Harry was stuttering as he answered Snape and looked at him for a second before looking down.

This was already getting tiresome and he had been here for only an hour or two. Harry felt his spirits sink lower than the floor as he thought about the next two months. The week with the Dursleys had been fantastic by comparison. At least at the Dursleys there was no constant fear of anyone peeping into his mind.

"Not all wizards can do this Potter," Snape began impatiently as he started walking again, "only those who are powerful to begin with or those who have cultivated that power over the years. Today only a handful of wizards can do this; the Dark Lord is among them and that is why you will learn this branch of magic that will stop him from using your mind for accomplishing his work."

Harry nodded his head listening and concentrating as Snape continued.

"How to close your mind is something I cannot tell you as you must decide for yourself how best to lay protections around your mind so that no one can go past it and see your memories. The best way to

do that is to arrange a lot of your memories, true ones with may be spell walls or other kinds of protection as you see it fit and then constantly check them and strengthen them, by the simple process to not giving in to your mind's whims and fancies. In short Occlumency is to have control of your mind and its actions and NEVER to allow the mind to have control over you and your actions."

"But how Sir, aren't me and my mind the same, I mean," as Snape scowled at Harry for interrupting him and asking silly and foolish questions, Harry continued hurriedly, he had been genuinely listening and had wanted to know honestly, "all of do what our mind dictates in any situation don't we?"

Snape stared at Harry and Harry immediately blinked his eyes and looked elsewhere, amusing Snape a lot and making him think seriously about just what Harry had in his mind that made him so desperate to protect it.

"Well your mind and you are two separate entities Potter and if you want to master even a little bit of Occlumency you must be prepared to accept this and work on it." Snape told him softly.

Harry frowned as he struggled to think of his mind that was just telling him to curse the git in front of him to oblivion, just so that he could look anywhere he pleased without the fear of Legilimency cast on him and himself, who was saying exactly the same thing. He heaved a huge sigh as he told himself that though both were saying just the same thing they were very different and felt like banging his head on the table in front of him, felt by both him and his mind, he told himself darkly.

"Potter please, I know it is very difficult but do try not to be foolish." Snape told him angrily as he glared at Harry as if he had heard aloud what Harry had thought.

Harry looked blankly at him as Snape came around and sat in front of him. He made himself comfortable and looked once again at Harry. "Now you had Umbridge last year." Harry shuddered as he remembered Umbridge and her blood quills and the cruciatus she had almost cast.

“Now when she spoke about the Dark Lord and told all of you his return was a figment of your imagination, you might have wanted to immediately jump up and say she was wrong and the Dark Lord had indeed returned. That was your instinct which is generally correct mind you, and powered by your mind that generally tends to give in to impulses of contrary emotions that you must have felt at the time.

“You must have kept silent though, as it was not prudent to talk to a Ministry official in a way that would bring down nasty consequences on you. The emotions were right, mind you but the power that acted opposite to your emotions that were equally correct, so you had to choose, you chose an action that was prudent at that point and so you exercised caution. You who are powered by your emotions and intelligence chose one. The other you quelled to either put it away for good as it would have never been a wise option or to act upon it in the future, when there might be a more favorable atmosphere. Do you understand now?”

Harry blushed in shame as he thought of how he had jumped and listened to his mind rather than his intelligence.

Snape smirked. “Of course I know you did no such thing and you spent a lot of time in detention with her but, I am merely explaining to you the difference between what you did and what you should have done.”

Harry did not know it was possible to go redder as he blushed furiously and glared at Snape for a second.

“What you did was to give in to your impulses. What you should have done was to exercise caution and kept quiet. You must listen to yourself and start discriminating so that every action is a well thought out process from a mind that listens to both the instinct and the intelligence inside you and makes the correct choice.

“Now I want you to try this after dinner. You may go and start preparing it now. I wish dinner to be ready by eight.” Snape got up and went into his room and shut the door, leaving a thoughtful and a resentful Harry. Thoughtful as he pondered all the things Snape had told him and resentful he was being treated like a house elf.

He got up and started working, chopping the vegetables and thinking furiously about what Snape had said. It made a weird kind of sense and Harry was amazed Snape was this polite to him. Harry had expected him to straight away start off with the Legilimens and had been shaking with terror, but Snape had been more than decent, more decent than Ron and the others and definitely more than Dumbledore.

Harry drew a deep breath as he tried to stop the thoughts of that one and only Order meeting he had attended. He decided it had put him off the Order for ever as one meeting and the after effects had made him feel Snape was better than all the people he thought were his friends. He brought back his thoughts to Occlumency once again and was soon trying out different shields in his mind he felt might just work.

Sharp at eight Snape came striding to the small table and sat down. Harry set the table and placed the dishes in the middle and Snape silently helped himself and then he noticed Harry standing and he still silently signaled to Harry to sit and begin.

Harry sat down with some relief as he was very hungry. He had only a cup of tea after lunch that he had had at the Dursleys and the tension and stress of Occlumency and the subsequent relief made his stomach ache with hunger. He immediately loaded his plate and then paused giving a brief glance at Snape waiting for a minute to see if Snape would object to the amount of food he had placed on his plate.

The Dursleys would have and in fact would have ordered him to remove half from his plate. Snape did no such thing as he went on with his meal. Harry started his own, still keeping an eye on Snape and soon he finished and looked up to find Snape staring at him intently.

Harry blushed, "I am sorry Sir, and did you want anything?" Snape frowned at Harry as if trying to find out why Harry was being polite as he answered him.

"No. have you finished?" at Harry's nod Snape got up and Harry got up as well and started piling the dishes in the sink to wash. There

were not many and with magic Harry had completed cleaning everything in no time.

“You may concentrate on the different shields you would like to protect your mind with and tomorrow we will continue.” Snape once again turned to go into his room for the night.

“Sir, may I use the bathroom now?” Harry asked him hating the flush that stained his cheeks. “Make it quick Potter.” And Snape banged the bedroom door close.

Harry washed and went to his bed and drew the curtains and cast a silencing charm on them and went to sit at the table and chair Snape had conjured for him. He removed the parchment and started writing to Hermione about his first lesson and soon was engaged in a very pleasant chatting session with her for the next half hour.

Then he went to work and taking out the runes book he spent about three hours studying hard and memorizing the various rune combinations. After that Harry once again cleared his mind and checking his shields went to sleep.

Snape in the meantime was thinking had had a very interesting day with Harry Potter. Potter was not like his father or even like his Godfather Black, who so adored him. Snape’s lips curled as he thought of Sirius Black and James Potter. With all his faults Black had truly loved Potter. Had he been present at the Order meeting that other day he knew Black would have stopped speaking to the werewolf and cut off his friendship with him. His one regret had been Potter could not be with him at Grimmauld Place so that they could bond closer with each other.

He frowned as he thought deeply. So many things did not make sense now that he was beginning to look deeply into the actions of the Headmaster after his talk with Minerva. While Evans may have sacrificed her life for her son, there was no blood magic as far as he knew that would keep Potter safe in an abusive household like the Dursleys. For the blood magic to work, Evan’s sister had to accept

the magic voluntarily. From Potter's memories, he knew that was not the case. So why did Dumbledore keep Potter there all these years?

Minerva would have made a wonderful guardian. Why was Minerva not allowed to parent Potter when she had volunteered for the job? The blood magic could have been altered he knew with a simple ritual that could have blood bonded Potter and Minerva, thereby transferring the protection if any from Petunia Dursley to Minerva.

More confusing was the imprisonment of Black. He had been a death eater and was in fact responsible for the deaths of Potter's parents' by handing over half the Prophecy to Voldemort and even though at that time Evans had probably not conceived, still that was a thin line. Albus had gone to great lengths to save him so that he could spy for Albus and he knew had had deeply repented and regretted each and every action as a death eater.

Albus had not done a thing to demand a trial for Black. That was astounding by itself as Black had been a brother to Potter something everyone knew. Sure Black had cried insanely that he had killed the Potters but why had no one verified it under veritaserum? Black could have been under the imperious curse that had made him betray the Potters.

If he had really been responsible for their deaths then why had no one demanded he be kissed? Albus could have demanded a trial and the moment veritaserum was given, he would have known Black was not the culprit and it was the rat who had betrayed him.

The rat was another confusing thing. In Potter's third year, when the dementors were guarding Hogwarts Albus had secured the wards very tightly so that he would know each and every member in the castle so that if Black or indeed anyone who were not part of the staff, elves and students entered he would know immediately. Why did he not realize that the rat was human? Snape sighed as he had too many questions and almost no answers at all.

Potter would have been fine with Black, Snape thought reluctantly to himself as he threw a bit of the floo powder in the fire in his room. There was another floo exit in the drawing room, but he had secured

both so that no one other than him could floo in and out unless he allowed them to.

“Minerva?’ he called softly wondering if she would be there in her private quarters. There was no one there and he left a parchment for her eyes only telling her to call him, whatever the time and the password for the floo and waited. He heard Harry finish with the bathroom and went to have a bath and came back all refreshed.

Half an hour later the floo glowed green as Minerva’s head came into view.

“Hello Severus. How are you and Harry?” she asked him her face very anxious.

“Fine your precious Gryffindor is fine and I am sure he is plotting ways to kill me right now.” he told her sneering at her.

She smiled, “Oh good. Harry’s fine and you look fine as well. Why did you call me? I was so worried.” Snape scowled at her happy sarcasm and then frowned.

“Have you got a minute Minerva? Can you come over? There are so many things that have begun to make me ponder and I wonder at the many things that have happened in Potter’s life so far that I needed to talk to someone about it.”

“Give me a minute, Severus I will come in as soon as I ward the place.” Five minutes later Minerva was in Snape’s room sipping a cup of tea.

“I am sorry I cannot take you to the drawing room as Potter is there.” Snape told her about the layout of the cottage.

“That is fine Severus. I really don’t mind. What did you want to ask me about Harry?” she asked him in concern.

Snape had called McGonagall mainly to seek information about everything that was bugging him and also find out where she was in the scheme of things that surrounded Potter and with that in mind he started.

He told her all his doubts, "I was the one who ran away with half the Prophecy Minerva and everyone knew Black would have died for Potter, James Potter as well as Harry Potter. Albus swore on his magic for *me*. Why didn't he demand a trial by veritaserum or at least ask Black for an oath on his magic about his loyalties. He ran away from his home Minerva to avoid being marked by the Dark Lord and Albus just sent him to Azkaban without a trial and Potter was left to rot with the Dursleys.

"Another thing that got to me was the protection magic. Potter I am sure is being protected by other magic not the blood magic based on the sacrifice of his mother which means he could stay just about anywhere."

"What!!" Minerva was shocked and stunned by what Severus was telling her. "What are you saying Severus?"

Snape nodded his head sharply. "The truth Minerva, only the truth. If Potter could get by with the protection that his mother's sacrifice gave him by staying with the muggles for only two months in a year after his eleventh birthday, why wasn't that rule enforced before? Second, this year Potter stayed there for only one week, to strengthen the protections Albus told us at the Order meeting.

"Two months after starting Hogwarts and one week when you want Potter to learn Occlumency, three weeks after third year when you allowed Potter to go to the Quidditch World Cup, four weeks after the Triwizard Tournament when you brought Potter to Grimmauld Place, Minerva blood wards don't work like that. You know that as well."

Minerva stared at him in horror as she tried to come up something that would justify Albus and failing stared at him again.

"Yet another thing that confuses me is his aura." Snape was silent for a second and then he continued quietly, "I am saying this in confidence hoping that you will not betray me Minerva. No one not even Albus knows that I can see auras."

Snape was silent for a second and said softly, "My aura color is green with silver lines and golden sparks." McGonagall gasped. Hers was green with silver dots and she could not see auras unfortunately for

her and Snape was talking about an aura that was more powerful than Albus, who had a pure green with silver lines.

“But Albus can see auras too, Severus and he told me your aura was pure green, when we were discussing power among the wizards.” she gasped.

“I know and if you change your aura to a power level below yours yes he would have been suspicious. All I did was to subdue the silver and golden in my aura so that I had power but not more than Albus or the Dark Lord, remember he could see auras too.”

“When did you do this? You-Know-Who must have spotted it at the very beginning.”

“In School during my fifth year,” Snape shrugged as McGonagall gasped once again. “What Minerva, I could see auras and when I find I have a more powerful one than most of my professors naturally I change it a little, not too much, but a little, yes.”

“Well! Severus I really don’t know what to say; you, you Slytherin you.” She accused him with a twinkle in her eye.

“Of course, my self preservation is priority.” He smirked back at her.

They were silent in a companionable silence as each pondered heavily on everything they had been discussing. “What about auras Severus? You were saying something when we got side tracked.”

Snape frowned, “Potter’s aura is all wrong. Remember the first year when you were so worried that Potter’s magic was probably weakened by the Dark Lord’s assault and Potter’s subconscious fight by his magic had made a mediocre wizard out of him?” she nodded her head remembering what she had discussed with Snape.

“Yes, he could not get anything before trying for at least a minimum of six to eight times and a maximum of I don’t know how many.” She told him. She had been saddened that Harry’s core had weakened by fighting the Dark Lord.

"Then how did Potter destroy Quirrell? The way he had burnt to ashes suggested a huge magic backlash. Potter was in the infirmary recovering from magical exhaustion not anything else, I know as I supplied the potions. The way he held off a hundred dementors. Remember the way Black had been so proud that Potter saved his life?" she nodded again as she listened to the facts that implied so much and none of it good.

"The way he fought the Dark Lord and came out of the graveyard was nothing short of stunning. I saw that in a Pensieve memory that Lucius showed me and my first reaction was awe, Minerva. Really, I know you will not believe me but I felt awed that a fourteen year old boy had held a very powerful wizard at wand point that joined with each other and still escaped. How did he defeat a sixty foot basilisk at twelve?"

McGonagall was very thoughtful as the implications of what Snape was trying to tell her washed over her. She looked at him in sudden comprehension. He nodded his head.

"Potter's aura has been changed. He has a blue aura and there is a jagged line surrounding it and you know what it means. If we are dependant on this boy to win the war and if all of us are to put our lives on the line for him, why is he not a warrior already? How can you expect him to defeat the Dark Lord, Bellatrix and the other death eaters with the spells he knows at present, nothing adds up Minerva and I am so confused.

"I would have left it there and not interfered as until now I sincerely believed Albus always thought the world of this boy and had only his best interests at heart; but this summer Albus gave this boy to me to break him and make him more resentful and lonely, not to teach him anything, I know that much. If he truly wanted Potter to learn, there is you, Bill Weasley, Moody, Shacklebolt so many others." Snape shrugged and stopped.

The truth was that Snape was so impressed that Potter had stood up to Black, he knew how much that must have cost Potter who thought Black was the father he did not have. When Minerva told him he had

sat long into the night and thought about so many things and put them all in their proper places.

Molly's comment was very true. Apart from him no one really said Potter was unruly, idiotic or rule breaking. All the so called rule breaking had been emergencies that any child who had a little sense of right and wrong would do.

The moment he had seen Potter in a different light so many inconsistencies had sprung up that had made his head spin. The fact Albus had a hand in all this worried and intrigued him.

While he had hated Potter he also had been sure that Albus wished nothing but the best for Potter and even the aura was Albus's way of protecting him from unnecessary speculations. After his conversation with Minerva, he found evidence totally to the contrary and that worried him. If Albus was intentionally doing all this then he felt it was his duty as a spy who was risking his neck every time he went to Voldemort, to find out why. He would try his best.

Potter was the center around which the Wizarding World was placed. His actions would ultimately make or mar his world as he knew Prophecies had a way of coming true and history had a way of repeating itself. Well, Snape would try his best to make sure history would not be repeated in the second war with Voldemort as the first war had almost destroyed the Wizarding World till the Potters died and Harry Potter saved them all.

This time Snape and he knew Minerva was on his side would do his best to ensure the Wizarding World's peace did not depend once again on the death of a Potter. That family had paid more than it's due to the world that they had been a prestigious part of.

The only problem was gaining the trust of the damn boy and he knew Potter would face Voldemort rather than confide in him. Still he had to try.

"What do we do now Severus? All this is so frightening and I really do not know what to do and whom to trust?"

“Trust no one Minerva, no one till they prove themselves. What we have discussed today is so important please assure me you will never speak of it till I agree and I will do the same, never speak till you are there with me.” Snape was alarmed as he considered the implications of all this falling into wrong hands.

Minerva nodded her head, “Of course Severus. I will never speak without your consent. Now you try and bond some way with Harry and see if you can get through to him.”

He doubtfully agreed to try and added a warning that it would be very difficult though and both the colleagues went to have a well deserved rest.

End of Chapter – 6

Chapter – 7

The next morning Harry was woken up by Snape sharp at 5.00 with a magical alarm that almost made Harry deaf and woke him up from a nice dream in which he was having Dumbledore at wand point and Moody's magical eye in his left hand and yelling at him. There was a weasel that had a red tuft on top that Hermione was holding in her hand and scolding it as it looked miserable and tried to escape and Ginny was standing in a very comical stance on one leg and her hands joined together in prayer over her head and chanting 'sorry' all over and over again.

He jumped out of his bed and the alarm disappeared. Harry drew the curtains apart and saw a disgustingly fresh Snape and went straight to the bathroom after taking his fresh set of clothes.

He returned feeling and looking a lot more awake and alert and went straight to put the kettle on.

Making the tea Harry sat down opposite Snape and slowly sipped his tea thinking that he had had a lucky escape yesterday and hoping he would escape to day as well. As if Snape knew what Harry was thinking, he told him sipping his tea, "Do you have any books on Occlumency?"

"Yes Sir." Harry told him apprehensively.

"May I see them now Potter? Bring them to me please."

Harry got up as Snape cast a warming spell on his tea an action that made Harry start and then frown with surprise at the concerned act and then noticing Snape looking at him, Harry hurried to his trunk and removed four books on Occlumency and Legilimency and came back and handed it over to Snape.

Snape looked at the texts, all of them were excellent and he nodded his head in mild approval.

“How much have you read from all of this?” he asked Harry softly, “Were these books the ones you got from Diagon Alley the other day?”

“Yes Sir. These along with a few others, I have read the ***How to close your mind and How to probe your mind*** two times already, while I am half way through ***Mind and its Protection :: Revealed*** .”

“You may read these texts today and ask me if you have any doubts. In the afternoon we will have a practical class and assess how much of the theory and my explanation of yesterday you have understood.”

Harry hesitated still scared about the veritaserum said very politely, “Sir I am not really prepared, please could you give me a little more time.”

Snape shook his head making Harry feel very apprehensive, “No Potter, we really do not have the time, in the next seven to eight weeks I wish to teach you a lot of things and it will not do to get stuck with Occlumency. Let me evaluate where you stand today and then we shall take it on from there. I will be down in my potions lab, if you have any doubts. The staircase is hidden behind that wall. Point your wand at it and say ‘*belladonna*’ and it will open.”

Snape set his cup down on the table and left leaving behind a resentful Harry who glared at his retreating back. Sharp at half past five Harry started practicing Occlumency like there was no tomorrow. While so much came easily to him, even Legilimency was so easy now, the stupid art of Occlumency was something he still had to get a hang of. Harry gritted his teeth, as he knew such thoughts would only make him commit more mistakes and he resolutely started checking his shields and building them up.

He had decided to built walls, big stone walls like that of Hogwarts from bottom to the roof of his mind and he kept strengthening it with some good and many bad memories, like winning the Quidditch Cup, the fight with the basilisk and so on. He had placed his most vulnerable memories of the last three weeks behind this wall and prayed it might be enough.

The whole morning went in this way and when an alarm sounded for Harry to start breakfast and then for lunch, he would get up and do them, Snape appearing always at the right time and then disappearing after having his meal.

Sharp at four the wall that was to the extreme left of the main door opened and Snape came out and went to stand behind one sofa his wand in his hand gesturing to Harry to take his position.

"Are you ready Potter? Then on the count of three," he said softly looking at Harry with an unreadable expression on his face, "three, two one Legilimens," Snape said as Harry looked at Snape in the eye for the first time since the Department of Mysteries.

Snape held his wand as he came up against the shield that Harry had been building and then slowly started pushing. He pushed through the first barrier and saw the battle at the Department of Mysteries where Sirius and Bellatrix were dueling. Harry saw him there and he pushed back fiercely. Snape reeled back with the force of the attack and went crashing down.

"Merlin, I am sorry Sir, are you hurt?" Harry ran to Snape who was picking himself up and groaning slightly.

"I am fine Potter." He snapped, feeling very curious inside at the power Harry had exhibited. He had kept Snape away from his mind by simply using his power to throw him out. While it was a very mild attack, still Harry had never been able to resist him before, except for that one time in his fifth year.

Snape walked back to the position he had been standing originally and asked Harry to take his position as well.

"Good Potter." He said, shocking Harry out of his wits, since when did Snape go about giving compliments? "This time I will push harder into your mind, Potter. Try and push me out as you just did without the help of your wand, if you can."

"But Sir, what you just did was pretty tough. Are you saying you will probe harder than that?" Harry protested. Snape nodded once and raised his wand.

Harry held his wand tightly as well when Snape's countdown and his whispered 'Legilimens' came. But this time the power behind Snape's push was enormous and Harry was not prepared. He tried his best to resist and push Snape out but Snape was going a bit too fast for Harry to realize what he was doing.

Suddenly Snape put some extra power and without warning and breeched Harry's defenses completely and saw Ron reading a letter about going to the Order meeting at half past ten when he was simply blown away.

Snape was thrown away across the room and fell against the wall. "*Protego*." Was the last thing he heard as he dashed against the wall and fell unconscious. In his desperation to ward off Snape, Harry had used all of his power and now Snape was almost blown away. Harry stood gaping in shock for a moment when he realized Snape was unconscious.

Harry ran to Snape bent down and cried softly, "Sir, Sir, Snape!" the last word came out as a shout as Harry saw the blood that was dripping on to the floor. Harry's heart almost stopped for a minute until he heard Snape's shallow and labored breathing and came back to life.

Harry quickly levitated him and almost ran into the potion master's bedroom, kicking the door open with his leg and placed Snape on the big bed. Snape was bleeding from his nose and from the back of his head and Harry had heard at least three breaks and he suspected one of them could be the spine.

He ran back to the bed for the book on healing that he had from the book case of Artemis Canogahn and ran back to the room where Snape was lying awkwardly, telling Harry his bones were broken in more than one place.

Harry quickly looked through the book and soon came to the place where there were specific instructions to stop bleeding from the head, nose, limbs, chest, back and stomach. It needed a potion to ingest along with a spell. Harry could have cried. He followed the book's instructions and first ran a diagnostic spell on Snape.

That read four bones broken, one right wrist, right knee, right ankle and pelvic. The bones had crumbled and in Snape's hips as well as in other places there was extensive bleeding. Harry was horrified at that and then the spell ran saying that there was internal bleeding from the nose and the back of his head where his head had cracked.

He studied the book as Snape by this time was beginning to look blue so Harry put him under the stasis charm as the book suggested and then calmed himself down as Snape retained that sickly blue color and did not deteriorate. The one advantage in all this horror Harry thought was that his spells were spot on and worked at the first try so that the stasis charm held at once instead of needing fifteen tries by which time Snape might have died.

Harry shuddered at the thought that Snape might die or be maimed for life. He ran to the potions lab forgetting in his terror that he could have contacted Hermione and asked her to get the Order.

He went into the lab that was so well stocked that Harry was relieved. He looked at the potion specified in the book and realized he did not have the method. Desperately Harry looked around and saw a lot of books in one corner and ran towards them. The third book had only healing potions and Harry easily found this potion *merantaga* and started assembling the ingredients and strictly followed the procedure and soon had it bubbling away. It had to boil till it became clear and Harry had time to wait as the book said that would take at least an hour.

In that time Harry raided the lab and added the pepper up potions, skelegrow, he had forgotten about that as the spell said that the bones in his pelvis were crushed, they would need to be re-grown and some other general healing potions that Snape had labeled so neatly and ran up with an armful of them and placed them on the desk in Snape's room.

Then Harry rushed back again and waited impatiently for the potion to finish. In the meantime Harry studied and memorized the spells to remove the crushed bones and other healing spells and then when the potion was ready Harry carefully poured it into the bottle never even thinking that he had been making potions so effortlessly, potions

a subject that was his worst and a subject that he hated as much as the person who taught it and it was that man who was here so ill.

He went up to Snape's room and arranged the potions carefully, removing their tops and pouring them into convenient vials for Snape and went with great trepidation to the bed and removed the stasis charm. The blood immediately started flowing and Snape was convulsing, when Harry cast the first healing spell, stopping the blood flow from the head and the nose and cast the *petrificus totalus* on Snape.

Then Harry removed Snape's outer robes and cut the robes generously where the bones had broken. He saw with horror the scars that seemed to be covering almost every inch of the exposed skin and swallowing and concentrating hard he slowly removed all the bones in the pelvic and wrist and then wanting to be on the safe side removed all the bones in the injured places.

Going to the bed and slowly holding up Snape a little, Harry levitated the vial and wandlessly moved the vial towards Snape's mouth and poured the potion down his throat. He waited for Snape to swallow it and then he started with the skelegrow and the other healing potions ending with the sleeping potion and made sure Snape would swallow by the simple process of holding his nose. Snape spluttered and spilled a little but swallowed everything that Harry gave him and went into a healing coma.

Harry cast a monitoring charm on Snape like the book said, so that he would know when he awoke and then crashed on the comfortable chair that was by Snape's bed. Harry got up only to use the bathroom and hurriedly make something for him to eat and drink. He sat there by Snape's side all the time. The skelegrow had worked as Harry felt the bones that grew overnight in the places where he had removed the bones.

All the other injuries had closed properly and had stopped bleeding afterwards. How much he had healed would be known only when Snape got up. Harry did not study or wander the entire time Snape lay unconscious. He was so anxious and terrified that he may have

killed the man he was actually thinking Dumbledore had a point in wanting him dead.

Snape's body was so full of scars; Harry felt for the man as he saw some of them were very old scars and realized that Snape must have had them since childhood. He must have had a terrible childhood and dreadful School years where he was tormented by Harry's father and Sirius and most likely ignored by his House mates, Harry thought with a pang, as he understood how lonely Snape must have been and without anyone to be with him and advice him or care for him, he must have joined Voldemort for the power that would give him over others who had lorded over him all through his life.

That was when he remembered Hermione and the parchment and he rushed off to write to her. He asked her to get the Order or do something. She was horrified as she read what Harry had written and she was going to agree and send a letter to the Order when she re-read the parchment and paused at the words *'I simply blew him away and I am afraid he saw Ron and Ginny reading the letter from Fawkes. He has broken bones and had so much bleeding but I was able to heal him with the book on healing that I had from Canogahn.'*

She had to get the Order without alerting them to the fact she could and was communicating with Harry through an enchanted parchment and at the same time she had to alert the Order about Snape as from what Harry had said, Snape was probably subjected to the full raw power of Harry and it must have hurt him very badly.

Harry could not afford to have another death on his head and she knew it would destroy him. She clutched her head in her hands as she thought fiercely about just how to do this without alerting anybody to what they were doing or arousing their suspicions.

Harry, first of all you must check your aura to see if it has the same color, if not make sure it is blue. The second thing is you have to pretend that you do not know what happened as Snape was viewing Sirius's fall into the veil and that you shouted 'Protego' and Snape just crashed into the wall. The third thing is you must make sure all your books are well hidden except common ones that are safe so that Dumbledore does not suspect you have been reading too much. Cast

the anti-magical eye spell on the trunk so that Moody cannot see into it.

Fourth tell them you checked the healing spells book in the potions lab and did your best. I am going to say, you used your galleon to alert all the members and that it was on my table and I saw the date changed and at once alerted the Headmaster. I will not know more than that, so play it carefully. Do all that I said and change the date on the galleon.

Even if anyone else alerts Dumbledore along with me, it will only prove that I am saying the truth and I really have no clue about your whereabouts, except that you are with professor Snape as you have told me that on the train and asked me to refrain from writing letters. That explains about the lack of letters to Ron as well. That's all Harry. Now hurry so that I can tell Dumbledore. Do all that I have told you and change the galleon. The moment you do so I will floo Mrs. Weasley at Grimmauld Place and inform her, and also ask if Ron's coin has been changed and act hysterical. Bye Harry and take care.

Harry read the letter with great relief and hurried to do as Hermione had instructed. He checked his aura and took care of everything else and then with a huge sigh activated the fake galleons and changed the date and the time and wiping the parchment clean, put it away safely and went to sit by Snape, who was still sleeping.

Albus Dumbledore was sipping hot tea and discussing with the Weasleys, McGonagall, Remus Lupin, Moody, Shacklebolt, Tonks and Hestia Jones about the war and Harry.

Molly was very worried and very unsure about Snape's treatment of Harry and she made sure all of them knew it.

"I still think it was wrong of you to send Harry to Severus. Merlin knows that man has a chip on his shoulder when it comes to Harry," she was cut off by Dumbledore.

"And Harry makes it impossible for Severus to be normal while dealing with him, you know that Molly. And Harry while being polite

and nice to us will run rings around us. Besides Severus is very proficient at Occlumency and as a master at that subject, he would be the best teacher for Harry. It would also divert Harry from the pain of losing Sirius.”

Molly looked dubious at this, while Ron and Ginny looked at each other and did not say a word in defense of Harry.

Remus was sitting in silence, thinking he had failed Harry in some way. Snape’s and Molly’s words had cut him to the quick and it had hurt him as he knew that what they said was true, but the wolf in him was still grieving for Sirius and it would be some time before it reconciled with the man in him that was telling the wolf it was not Harry’s fault.

“Mrs. Weasley, Ron, Ginny, anyone home here?” came a shout at that time from the floo connection in the drawing room. All of them rushed with their wands at the ready to find Hermione’s face sticking through the floo looking very anxious.

“Miss. Granger!” exclaimed Dumbledore. “What happened? Are your parents quite all right?” he asked her very concerned.

“Yes Sir,” replied Hermione breathlessly as Ron came over grinning at her. Just for a second Hermione’s eyes hardened then she smiled, “Hello Ron. How have you been? Can you see if your galleon has been activated? Mine has,” turning to Dumbledore she smiled once again and added, “Sir these galleons were our way of telling everyone about the meetings of the Dark Arts. Today as I was reading an advanced book on charms, I saw it vibrate on my desk. I saw that the date had been changed and so was the time. I thought may be Harry was trying to say something.”

Dumbledore’s eyes changed from concerned to alert. “May I see it Miss Granger?” turning to Ron he added, “Mr. Weasley may I see your galleon as well?”

Ron grinned at Hermione who gritted her teeth as she realized that he had to yet ask after her or about Harry and scrunched up her face as she noticed Dumbledore looking at her, “Sir it is really uncomfortable one the floor. May I be excused to get a pillow?”

Dumbledore's face cleared and he nodded as Ron came running down, "Hey Hermione, where are you going?"

She did not answer as she had already withdrawn her head and standing up went to the bathroom to scowl and let off a few choice words. If she felt this bad about facing all of them from the safety and security of her home through the floo, she thought with a pang about how Harry must have felt about dealing with all these goons and not letting on more than he was supposed to know.

She went back quickly and taking a pillow put some floo powder into the fire and put her head once again into the floo smiling and putting her shields right up. She had taken to studying Occlumency right from the moment Harry had shown her the memories and she had done it openly to encourage Harry while they were in School.

To Harry's jealousy and envy which he professed to have in large quantities as he told her sourly, when she had told him organizing her mind was so easy and she had got the hang of Occlumency quite nicely. She had grinned at him and whispered that his secrets were now safe and no one could pry it out of her, he had been only slightly mollified.

"Sorry Sir," she smiled at everyone including Ron who grinned back at her. He and Ginny had got the news from Mrs. Weasley and the others who were there and no one noticed the look of shock and horror on McGonagall's face.

"Miss. Granger, I am afraid that I really do not know just where the place is. I know it is called Rose Cottage but where it is, Severus has always guarded it most jealously and I really do not think he has invited anyone there. It is his sanctuary and he has taken Harry there only so that Voldemort will not be able to harm Harry there."

McGonagall's face turned white with horror but as all of them were gasping as they understood what Dumbledore was saying once again no one noticed it.

"But Sir, what can we do? What if Harry is in danger there?" she asked anxiously noticing the look of jealousy on Ron's face.

Dumbledore smiled at her, "Nothing until Severus approaches us my dear. If you get any more notice on your galleon you may tell us and then we shall try to do something if it continues for more than a day or two. But for now I really do not think there is cause to worry as Severus would have used the Order's means of communication and would have informed us of anything untoward. Let us not think of the worst and let us relax." Dumbledore smiled at her gently and she nodded looking obviously relieved that Dumbledore was in charge.

She then spoke to the others quite as usual and gaily waving to Ron who also told her that Snape was a git and Harry had probably hexed the greasy bat and he had punished Harry. "Tough luck for Harry, but with Snape you really cannot expect anything else. Just when are you coming Hermione?"

"Next week and you make sure that you finish your holidaying by then so that we start with our NEWTS potions. Have you decided what you are going to take?"

Ron shook his head and Hermione smiled, though her eyes looked very strained, "No matter, Ron. We will discuss when I come there." Hermione left Grimmauld Place and sank down on the floor crying as she thought of Ron and his betrayal. All for some money, she thought bitterly.

Dumbledore and the others had gone back to the kitchen and were discussing this latest news about Harry. As usual Molly Weasley was worried.

"Albus don't you think you should make an effort to see why Harry has alerted the others? Remember he has not taken his owl there and there is no other way he could communicate to anybody else."

"Severus has not sent word Molly," Albus told her patiently. "Severus may be harsh, but willing to harm a boy in his care? No Molly I don't think so and it could be something as simple as Harry playing with the galleon, not realizing that Miss. Granger or Ron would have seen it and rushed to you or to me. We will wait for Severus's message to inform us if anything is remiss at the cottage. I will send him a patronus asking him to answer if Harry activates the galleon again as

that might tell us there is a problem but I really do not think there is any cause to worry.”

Dumbledore shook his head as Molly Weasley pleaded once again, “I really do not know what kind of wards Severus has placed there. Once he is there he does not communicate with anyone in any manner short of a catastrophe. We will wait for a day for an answer before thinking of horrible thoughts.”

Dumbledore got up before Molly Weasley could pester him more and left smiling at one and all. Slowly all the others too left leaving the Weasleys and Lupin in the house.

McGonagall flood to Hogwarts along with Dumbledore pleading a headache and went into her private rooms and warded the door. She went into her bedroom asking a house elf for a cup of tea and after it went away she carefully warded the door and cast many spy spells and also many wards to ensure that no one would even want to come in and took a pinch of floo powder and threw it into the fire in her bedroom.

Hermione was could have cried with anger, she was so furious at the callous treatment of Dumbledore, Ron and the Order. She wondered how Harry and she had been so blind to all of them. Well, she conceded reluctantly everyone except Mrs. Weasley, only no one listened to her.

She did not know what to do as Harry would have put his parchment away and would be waiting for the Order. She took out her parchment and sat down by her bed and patiently waited for Harry to write and ask her why no one had come.

Harry was waiting with fear, anxiety and a host of other contradicting emotions as he looked at the peaceful face of Snape who looked so relaxed and young as he slept there. Harry on the other hand was not so relaxed or peaceful as he fidgeted continuously wondering if he

had done the right thing and praying that Snape be all right and he had not done lasting damage to his potions professor.

An hour later the fire in Snape's room turned green and McGonagall stepped out and looked at Harry and then at the still figure on the bed and her eyes widened in concern.

"What happened here Potter?" she asked crisply.

"Oh good professor, you got the message I sent through the galleon. Who told you, was it Ron?" Harry asked her relief in his voice. "Professor, we were practicing Occlumency and professor Snape was probing in my mind and I wanted to somehow push him out and I cast the '*Protego*' charm and suddenly he went crashing into the wall behind him." Harry was looking down in sheer guilt and he missed the look of amazement on McGonagall's face as he recounted what had happened.

"You mean the professor went sailing and hit the wall? How far was the wall and where did he get hurt?" she asked him, running her wand over Snape and waiting for the diagnosis.

Harry did not answer flushing with guilt and fear. McGonagall looked up at him and was about to say something when the diagnosis only said Snape was in a healing sleep and all his vitals were functioning properly and his wounds had closed properly and were in a healing process now. She looked as if she wanted to question Harry about the severity of the wounds but she did not say anything.

"Professor Snape seems all right Potter." Harry heaves a huge sigh of relief as he grinned at his Head of House truly happy that nothing terrible had happened to Snape and nodded his head as she continued to speak, "He is in a healing sleep that is all. Ask him to call me when he awakes" She turned to leave and then hesitated.

"Potter," she began quietly, "professor Snape gave me the secret password of the floo on the condition that I inform no one about the fact that I had access to this cottage. No one, not professor Dumbledore or any other member of the Order or anyone else knows I have come here. All of them have assumed that you are merely

playing with that galleon of yours when Miss. Granger told us it had been activated.”

Harry gaped at this and then flushed angrily, “Professor isn’t it silly to allow us to be here with no outside connection whatsoever? How could Snape,” at her glare Harry hurriedly corrected himself, “I mean professor Snape do this? What if he had been injured seriously and I had no way of contacting anyone?” he demanded indignantly.

McGonagall’s lips thinned as she glared at the sleeping Snape. “I really have no answers to your questions Potter. But you may be rest assured that I will make sure that this is not repeated again. Ask him to call me when he awakes. I must leave now and please make sure you do not tell anyone I have been here.” She looked straight at him and raised her eyebrows, waiting for confirmation.

“Yes, professor, I will not tell anyone.” She nodded her head once sharply and throwing a pinch of the floo powder left for Hogwarts once more.

Harry waited until she had left and then checking after Snape hurried to get the parchment so that he could tell Hermione what had happened. Snape and McGonagall were friends with each other so much that Snape gives the secret to her and not even to Dumbledore. There was something so very wrong about that and on top of all that McGonagall asks him not to breathe a word to any one about her visit meaning Dumbledore and the Order primarily of course.

Harry wrote all this and waited for her answer. It came fast and from a very relieved Hermione.

Oh good she came Harry. The idiots except Mrs. Weasley said you were playing with the galleon and I was so worried. How can Dumbledore be such a fool? How dare he just send you off like this? I am so happy McGonagall came and I agree with you that it looks all very suspicious and very cloak and dagger. Snape trusting McGonagall is nothing short of amazing.

Harry, I have been called to spend the rest of the holidays at Grimmauld Place and I will be going there and I will try and find out more, especially just where the rest of the Weasley family is and well,

anything I can. The only problem would be to act very friendly with Ron and Ginny and look up to Lupin both will test my acting abilities to the maximum. I hope I can pull it off and get some useful information in our fight.

Harry read all this with a smile especially when he saw she had called Dumbledore a fool.

If you are going to Grimmauld Place remember to act normally and make sure you do not give away anything to anyone.

Harry and Hermione chatted to and fro for a long time about anything and everything and then after they said their goodbyes. Harry was amazed at how easy he found it to chat to Hermione and he smiled feeling a bit foolish as he thought of how eagerly he was waiting to talk to her again. He put his parchment away carefully as did Hermione who went down to have a late dinner with her parents and Harry sat down to wait for Snape to get up and kill him.

End of Chapter – 7

Chapter – 8

It was on the third day that Snape woke up from the healing sleep. It was just before lunch time and Harry had just been wandering in and around the small cottage thinking in a desultory manner of making lunch and had come to check up on Snape before going to wander around the cottage restlessly yet again.

He was very worried as Snape had still to open his eyes and although McGonagall had told him Snape was in a healing coma, Harry had been tying him self into knots about hurting Snape so badly, thinking all kinds of things and clutching his hair and putting his face into his hands in despair and unable to concentrate even for a little while all this time.

Harry walked around a few times and then came back to sit with Snape once more and ten minutes later he was once again about to get up to go to the kitchen to make lunch, when he saw Snape moving slightly and groaning in pain. Harry's heart jumped in joy as he went at once to the small table by the bed and checked to see if the healing potions and pepper up potions were all in place and waited for Snape to regain consciousness fully and recognize him.

Snape groaned a lot more before he opened his eyes and looked around hazily trying to get his bearing right. He looked right through Harry two times before he registered Harry's presence as his eyes came around the room third time.

"Potter," he rasped, "what the hell did you do?"

"I am very sorry Sir. I never meant to hurt you. I only cast the '*Protego*' and you went and crashed into the wall. But not to worry Sir, professor McGonagall came here two days ago and checked on you and said everything was fine and you were in a healing sleep." Harry replied in a hurried tone, wanting to give all the facts before Snape would get out of bed and kill him.

Snape stared at Harry as Harry galvanized into action and started taking the various potion vials and opened them and brought the first

one to Snape and held it close to him. "Healing Draught Sir, from your lab below."

Snape tried to get up to drink it and found that his entire body was so sore that he groaned again. Harry hastened to help him and held him gently and poured the vial into Snape's mouth silently and banishing the empty vial, summoned another one and plucking it gave that to Snape as well. Two more potions and half an hour later Snape felt much better and helped by Harry was able to sit up in bed.

Harry excused himself and taking the empty vials ran out of the room, relieved Snape had not hexed him or ordered him to call McGonagall and sent him with her to be tutored by other members of the Order.

While Snape was hateful, Harry at least knew where he stood with that man and he also knew Snape would never sugar coat anything and would never lie to him. Harry felt that he preferred this treatment way better than the one where he was fed lies and falsehoods all in the name of the greater good.

Harry went to the kitchen and set the cauldron on the stove and started cooking. Soon there was an aroma that was mouth watering and Harry removed the stew and pouring a good amount of it into a bowl, left the rest under a warming charm for him to eat later and ran back to Snape's bedroom.

As Harry entered Snape was trying to stand up and Harry went to the table and placed the bowl on it, cast another warming charm and went to Snape.

"Sir," Harry protested, "you are not supposed to get up just yet."

"Potter, do not be silly, I need to use the bathroom. Unless you have other suggestions?" he glared at Harry who blanched at the other suggestions that probably translated into bed pans and the like and then went red with embarrassment.

"Sorry Sir," he replied in a subdued voice and went to assist Snape. Harry put an arm on Snape's waist and slowly helped him get up. Snape's face crunched up in pain and was sweating heavily. Harry thought for a minute as Snape stood there panting with the effort of

standing up even with Harry's help and suddenly Snape yelped a little as he was being levitated off the floor.

"Potter," he asked Harry in a strangled voice, "pray tell me what in Merlin's name are you doing?"

"Levitating you Sir and I will take you to the bathroom like this. It will be easier than walking for now."

Harry carefully levitated Snape into the bathroom and slowly set Snape on the floor holding him with his other hand all the while. Once he made sure Snape was steady, he went out and waited by the door for Snape to finish his business.

Snape called out to Harry after a while and when Harry went in Snape was looking slightly blue with the effort he had made and was sweating heavily. Harry wasted no time and levitating Snape he returned to the bedroom and put him down gently on the bed. Harry then wiped the sweat from Snape's face and body and slowly shifted him into a sitting position, "Potter, get me some water."

Harry conjured a glass of water and put the stew bowl on the table and so did not see the frown Snape sported on his face for a second as he saw Harry effortlessly conjure a glass of water that was very easily seventh year stuff.

Harry held the water to Snape's mouth as Snape's hands trembled so much that he was spilling the water all over him. After Snape drank the water Harry took the bowl of stew and started feeding Snape gently, feeling very guilty that Snape was in such bad shape that he could not even hold a glass of water properly.

Harry knew that Snape would be fine in another day but the damage his power when not controlled could unleash still scared him even after three days. He knew when Dumbledore came to know of this, it would only reinforce his opinion of killing Harry.

Snape had a strange look on his face as Harry fed him patiently. He was still mildly shaking with the impact of being blown away and the raw power he had witnessed truly scared him. More than the spell, it was the sheer magic of Harry that had created so much damage in

him. Harry's unconscious desire to prevent Snape from probing further had led to the uncoiling of his magic that was still affecting him.

He had been out cold for two whole days and he was sure he would need at least another day in bed before he could move around. What kind of raw power was that? Snape sighed as his buzzing head was unable to understand anything at all.

Snape tried his best to think deeply as he swallowed mechanically what Harry fed him, thinking of the memory that had made Harry react in such a manner. He began to analyze and found his head aching badly and he gave it up as a bad job in disgust and relaxed fully as Harry finished feeding him and grimaced at the thought of having a bloody Potter feed him and take him to the bathroom of all places.

This was what would manifest as his greatest fear from now on when he came face to face with the dementors, Snape thought even as another part of his brain that was pure mush he told himself sternly, felt nice? Damn it he did not do nice, that would haunt him forever as well he felt as he scowled at that stupid part of him that felt so good to be taken care of when he was just not able to help him self.

All this time whenever Snape had been under the cruciatus or under any curse Voldemort would throw, he would use his portkey after he had dragged himself outside the wards and fall in a special bed that was charmed to receive him and Poppy would treat him and he would begin his duties as soon as possible. For the first time in so many years Snape had someone who took this kind of care and even fed him.

Snape was torn in two as he wanted to sneer at himself for being so pathetic that he was glad to have even Potter attend on him, while the other was telling him that maybe what Minerva and Molly had said the other day had a point and Potter was like this only with him as he had started the 'Potter is stupid like his father and dog father' fight in his very first potions class.

Snape shook his head to clear it and obediently swallowed a sleeping potion that Potter who had been looking at him with increasing

concern said would help and went to sleep promising him self that he would think rationally when he woke up later.

Snape slept peacefully all through the day and night and woke up very early in the morning to find Harry was sleeping right next to him in a camp bed he had obviously conjured. So Harry had been sleeping here for the last three days. Snape felt something warm moving inside him and scowled.

He was feeling much better. The trembling had stopped completely and only the soreness remained. A strange feeling that all his scowls could not banish came over him as he saw Harry sleeping so peacefully.

As he continued to look at Harry his mind started working with the usual amount of alertness and intelligence as ever. Why had Harry's magic reacted so violently? Usually this type of magic was released only when there was extreme anger or fear or being cornered by enemies and where you didn't have a choice of any kind except to have to fight your way out. Potter knew that what Snape was conducting were lessons on Occlumency and he was supposed to learn to shield his mind not attack with raw magic.

The power of Harry's magic was more than what he had ever seen, not even Dumbledore's or Voldemort's had been able to exude such raw magic or power. He frowned as he looked at the sadness in Harry's face even as he was sleeping; maybe the boy was dreaming about Black.

What had it been, the memory that had made Harry so desperate to throw his magic at Snape and going by what Harry had said, he had not even felt the magic leave him or feel tired or anything really. That was even more incredible. Snape's brows furrowed deep as he thought of the last thing he had seen in Potter's mind before he had smashed against the wall.

His eyes widened as he remembered what he had seen and what Ron Weasley had read out to his sister. His mouth thinned in a determined way and he summoned his wand and slowly got out of bed. He washed and feeling clean and fresh, he threw a pinch of the floo powder and poked his head into the fire. McGonagall was

sleeping, the thick curtains drawn around her bed tightly, and he called out softly to her.

She peeped out of the curtains all disoriented and then seeing Snape became alert quickly. "Give me a few minutes and I will come there." She said softly, just waiting for Snape to withdraw his head before jumping out of bed and racing away to the bathroom. In fifteen minutes, she was in Snape's bedroom and he placed a finger on her lips and took her to the drawing room.

"Severus how have you been? Harry told me you had awakened yesterday but went back to sleep and you did sound all right, only tired. What in the name of Merlin happened between you and Harry? Harry was so scared and said a shield charm of all things hurt you." She asked him the moment they stepped into the drawing room concern in her voice.

"I am fine Minerva. How much time do you have?"

"As much time as you need for me to stay." She replied promptly.

Snape made both of them tea, and with biscuits they went to the sofas and sat down. Snape cast a few privacy spells and turned to McGonagall.

"I was thrown with a surge of magic against the wall that was definitely not caused by a shield charm. Oh Potter cast the *Protego* all right, but what hurt me was his raw magic, Minerva. I have not seen such power in my life in anybody. Not Albus and certainly not the Dark Lord."

McGonagall gaped at him. "What are you trying to say Severus? I am unable to comprehend."

"There was so much power in him, Minerva. To add to that I saw him conjure a glass of water from thin air, not summon it from the kitchen but conjure it. Since he is not Granger or a Ravenclaw and until now he has not been anything other than mediocre, I was astounded at that to say the least. Another thing that shocks me is the fact that Potter did not even get tired or exhausted after releasing this type of magic. That shocks me greatly as well."

McGonagall was perplexed, "Severus, Harry knew that all you were doing was teaching him Occlumency as he never said a word to me about you trying to be all unfair to him," as Snape looked indignant and opened his mouth to tell her off, "wait, what I am so poorly trying to explain is the fact that Harry knew you were not doing anything other than Occlumency, so why should he feel so threatened? After all you have seen all of his memories except the Department of Mysteries and Sirius falling into the veil and that is not reason enough for his magic to surge like this."

Snape was silent for sometime as if he was deciding something in his mind and then he quietly turned to McGonagall and said very softly even though they were surrounded by privacy spells and no one could hear them.

"I did see something Minerva. I saw Fawkes flash in with a letter to Ron Weasley and his sister and maybe Granger, I do not know. I saw Weasley read about an Order meeting at half past ten and then I knew no more."

McGonagall's eyes had widened impossibly as she stared at Snape her mouth hanging open as she tried to take in what he had just said. Weasley and his sister were getting letters to attend the Order meeting? What was happening here?

"I do not really think Granger was in this as Potter has been very friendly to her, but if you will think back you will realize that he and Granger did not seem to be missing the other member of their trio. I can believe it if Potter gets letters from Albus but Weasley and sister? All of this sounds impossible and improbable Minerva and I am at a loss to understand." Snape finished and he sat back and slowly sipped his tea looking at his colleague and giving her the time to take all this in.

Both of them sat there trying to make sense of just why Albus should be writing letters to Ron Weasley. "I am sure Molly did not know Severus." McGonagall said at last as Snape nodded his head in agreement.

Before Snape could say anything more there was a noise behind him and he turned to see Harry walking out looking very anxious and

seeing him and McGonagall, his expression relaxed and Snape once again felt a surge of emotion in his chest that he irritably pushed down all the while looking at Harry steadily.

"Hello professor," he said looking at McGonagall and then turning to Snape, "Sir, how are you? Sorry," he blushed, "I over slept. Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes Potter. Now kindly refresh yourself and come back here." Harry did not say another word. He went to his trunk and took out fresh clothes and went into the bathroom and came out in ten minutes to find McGonagall and Snape still talking to each other in low tones.

Harry's heart had sunk into his shoes as he saw his Head of House. So Snape was going to use her to punish him. Well, at least she would be fair and not tell him to do absurd things like Snape would.

Snape silently handed him a cup of tea and Harry unthinkingly conjured up a chair for himself as he took the cup of tea not noticing the look Snape and McGonagall shared as he was thinking rather morbidly about how Snape of all people was handing him a cup of tea.

He supposed that Snape would want him fed and watered before bringing down the axe on him. Well he would take anything and he was already subduing his pride telling it sternly any punishment would be better than going to Grimmauld Place or getting trained by Remus or Moody or Dumbledore himself.

Harry was startled out of his thoughts by Snape who addressed him first. "Potter what were my injuries and how did you treat them?"

Harry gulped and looked down at his shoes as he told Snape about how extensively he had hurt himself and what Harry had done. Snape's eyes had narrowed as Harry stumbled along mumbling about what had happened and Snape's eyes as well as McGonagall's widened as Harry told them how he had removed the bones entirely and then given skelegrow and how he had prepared the NEWT level potion and had fed it to him.

Both Snape and McGonagall looked at each other as Harry finished and looked up at last his face red with fear and embarrassment.

"Sir I will take any punishment you give me. I never meant to harm you or hurt you. I really don't know why my *Protego* was so strong all of a sudden. I only meant to push you out of my mind" Harry finished very defensively looking down once again.

There was no response for a long time and Harry frowned as he looked up slightly to see both McGonagall and Snape looking at him. He blushed and looked back at them with an air of bravado.

"I presume you do not want me to go to the Headmaster with this?" Snape asked at last. Harry's answer to this question would set the trend for the rest of the questions he had. He had been thinking furiously and he had come to the conclusion that Harry Potter did not like the Headmaster for more than one reason if especially Albus was sending letters to Weasley to attend Order meetings that Harry and Hermione were not privy to.

Harry's reaction was startling to both Snape and McGonagall. He nodded furiously. "I will do anything you say Sir, but I don't want go anywhere. I... I will behave and be good Sir, please believe me. It was a mistake. I never meant to hurt you." Harry was desperate but he really did not have a choice. If Snape dragged him off to Dumbledore Harry knew he would not be able to control himself and it would be disastrous.

Snape stared at Harry as did McGonagall. Then Snape glanced at her just for a second and looked at Harry, who was staring at him with wide eyes full of desperation.

"I will do so Potter on one condition." Snape started softly.

"Yes Sir." Harry nodded his head.

Snape looked at Harry and softly asked him watching his reaction closely as was McGonagall, "then you will tell us why Weasley and his sister were reading an invitation to the Order meeting that was held in the School a day before they left. In fact I wish to see it." Snape flicked his wand and a beautiful pensieve came right into his hands.

Harry sat there unmoving totally flabbergasted and horrified to the core. So Snape had seen it and had also heard Ron reading the letter. Harry went pale and he just sat there still and unable to think a way out of this. He wished Hermione could be here, she would know what to do but now he was caught up here alone with Snape and McGonagall both of them strict and very demanding people.

Harry sat there for a very long time not saying a word. After it looked as if Harry would continue to sit and not say a word, Snape cleared his throat softly, "Potter the professor has to leave. When she does what she will tell the Headmaster will depend," Snape stopped as Harry was already removing the memories from his forehead.

Again Snape looked at McGonagall. Harry was not to know how to do this. He looked back at Harry who had now finished putting the memories into the basin. He had removed bits and pieces of many memories and had placed them in to the basin, knowing that the memories would play out from the first one he had placed to the last. Harry put the last memory into the basin and looked up at Snape and McGonagall.

"Sir all I want from both of you is an assurance that you will never say a word of what you see in here to anyone without my consent, please."

"What if I do not give it Potter?" Snape asked him his eyes gleaming.

"I will fight you and try my best to oblivate you, both of you." Harry told him angrily as he tried hard not to think of what would have happen if Snape or McGonagall were to take this to anyone.

Snape to Harry's surprise did not retort back sharply. "I will make no promises until I have seen what is inside. If it necessitates a promise both professor McGonagall and I will consider it."

Snape did not wait for an answer, but he flicked his wand once and the room became dark and then he tapped the basin and the memories started playing out.

"I was under the invisibility cloak and I had placed a silencing charm on myself because of a first or second year who was very frightened

by my footsteps that could be heard, but no one could be seen.” Harry told them in stilted tones.

The memory started in the infirmary, where Snape and McGonagall watched Fawkes flash in with a letter that Ron read out aloud; the spells Harry placed on himself to hide his aura and other things; the Order meeting; the meeting that took place after the Order meeting.

McGonagall gasped there, placing her hand over her mouth and Snape drew his breath in sharply, glancing at Harry for a second; then as the memories continued and Snape turned away, Harry going to Snape for the potion; the meetings with Hermione in the Room of Requirement the next day; the Prophecy; their discoveries and Harry’s aura; Snape gasped here as he saw Harry’s aura as did McGonagall; Harry’s foray into Diagon Alley; his meeting with the goblins and ending with the scene with the Order members speaking to Harry and the Grangers at Privet Drive.

The memories ended and Snape and McGonagall sat as still as Harry had a little while before. Harry had shown only brief moments of each of the meetings; the important things they had discussed and done. Not the entire process, even then Snape and McGonagall seemed totally shell shocked and totally stunned.

“Sir, professor, can you at least now promise me that you will not breathe a word about this to anyone.” Harry was scared about this silence and he wanted the promise out of the way before McGonagall suddenly decided to leave for Hogwarts and spill everything to Dumbledore.

“I have never been so glad in my life that I have been privy to something like this Potter. While the contents horrify me, and I know you showed this only under duress, nevertheless you may be rest assured that you have me on your side in this horrible war, and I will not only not reveal what you have shown me so far, I will also from now on inform you about all that goes on in the Order and do my best to help you in any way I can and you may be rest assured no will ever dare kill or even think of it you as long as I am alive.”

McGonagall was foaming at the mouth as she realized that this boy and Granger had been planning to go it alone, until the goblins

offered their hand in friendship. How that Weasley boy and girl could be Gryffindor she did not know, but at that time the memory of a rat came to her and she realized that these two were like Peter.

She felt tears come into her eyes as she thought of all that Harry had sacrificed and all that he had endured until now and even when the odds were against him, even when Dumbledore was planning to kill him and take over his assets, he was still willing to work to defeat Voldemort. That more than anything touched her and moved her from the bottom of her heart.

"Why did not go away Harry? You could in fact I say you must. This ungrateful Wizarding World does not deserve your sacrifice. You have given too much already." McGonagall angrily wiped the tears from her eyes as she looked at the boy she had wanted to raise as hers in the first place.

Harry shrugged as he glanced at Snape who was still silent and staring at Harry with an inscrutable expression on his face. "If I do then the reason my parents' died and the way I managed to off, off, off... Sirius who died for me would be in vain."

McGonagall got up and went to where Harry was sitting and bent down and hugged him gently and awkwardly, but pouring all the comfort she could.

"Sirius falling into the veil is not your fault Harry. It is ours. We never did anything that would have made you think and be a little more cautious, never gave you the information that should have been told to you so many years back. Sirius argued so much at every Order meeting that you should be told about the Prophecy and the mind link, but Albus shut him and all of us saying he wanted you to enjoy your School time without all of this hanging over your head.

"Never regret you went to fight for Sirius. That is what families do. Love each other and fight for each other. Had Sirius known that you were in danger do you really think he would have cared two hoots about his status as a wanted criminal or Albus's advice about not going out? He would have hexed his way to hell and back and got to you. He did just that when he came to the Department of Mysteries to save you. That is what you did as well."

“But he died.” Harry’s voice came softly; trembling in its grief as he finally said the words that made Sirius a part of the past.

“Yes, he did; that was sad and very unfortunate, but he died for you as you were prepared to and would have died for him. But do you know one thing Harry? He would have lived for you as well. That is what I want you to do. Live for him, and your parents’ who gave their lives as did Sirius who gave his life in the hope and knowledge that you will have yours.

“Defeat not only You-Know-Who, but Dumbledore, Moody and the others who think that you should be done away with just because you had the gall and the nerve to do at fifteen months what they cannot dream in their ten lifetimes to come.” She held on to Harry who was sitting quietly letting her words of much needed comfort wash over him as he drowned in memories that were very few in his opinion, of Sirius.

At that time a patronus came from Albus who had called for a meeting at Grimmauld Place. She stood up and smiled at Harry slightly, “Well wish me luck. I am off to my new career in spying. I will tell you what happened there Harry. Start the real work with Severus as this holiday here in so much isolation is ideal for learning about all your gifts.”

Snape flicked his wand at her as she was about to floo, “de-scenting for Lupin.” Was all he said and then she smiled at Harry and left. There was an uncomfortable silence after she left and Snape got up and swiftly started preparing lunch giving Harry the time to calm down after McGonagall’s emotional speech. They had missed breakfast and both of them had got up very early.

Soon Snape laid the table and silently gestured to Harry to eat and not waiting for Harry, Snape sat down without much ado and started eating. Harry too, sat down opposite him and wondered how he could ask Snape to tell him personally that he would not reveal anything to Dumbledore and Voldemort as McGonagall seemed to categorically speak for both of them.

He decided to ask Snape as soon as lunch was over.

End of Chapter – 8

Chapter – 9

Snape and Harry ate their lunch in total silence and afterward Harry stood up and cleared everything away. The food was delicious and Harry had been surprised at how good a cook Snape was. Harry had eaten his lunch fully and turned to the drawing room where Snape was sitting down.

He looked up as Harry came and did not say a word as Harry hesitated a little and then sat down opposite him.

“Potter, why did you leave a million pounds for the family that hated you, abused you and never took care of you?” he asked Harry softly.

Harry shrugged. “They did take care of me and not let me out into the streets to fend for myself. I have so much now and,” Harry shrugged once again.

“And the Fidelus?”

“Well they are under threat from Voldemort only because they are related to me. I thought placing them under the Fidelus for a short while until everyone forgets about them would be safer for them. They never wanted to have to do anything with my mother and me. It was Dumbledore who probably forced them to look after me because of my mother’s sacrifice. I feel whatever they did they do not deserve to die for having an opinion of the Wizarding World that is not very favorable.”

Snape looked at him with unblinking eyes, “Ah, but you see Potter you were not protected by any wards that were the result of your mother’s sacrifice.”

Harry, who was looking down, looked up sharply at this and his eyes darkened in anger. “What? I thought I was safe there from Voldemort,” he noticed Snape was not flinching or wincing at Voldemort’s name and continued angrily, “then why was I left there? Dumbledore.” He breathed the last word softly in anger as he

answered his own question and the Order meeting he had attended without invitation came to his mind.

“He wanted me to suffer so that I would be prepared to listen to him and do anything to get out of that place.”

Snape nodded still staring at Harry. “McGonagall is related to you though very distantly. She pushed very hard to gain custody of you when Black was sent to Azkaban. Albus denied her request saying that here at your aunt’s home you would be safe. She is most unhappy and she feels she has let down your parents and grandparents by letting you live in that place.”

Now Harry was totally gob smacked and suddenly the reason why McGonagall had stood up so vehemently for him and the way she had hugged him and tried to comfort him made a lot of sense.

“That is why she wants to help me.”

Snape shook his head. “No Potter she would have helped you in these circumstances if you had been Draco Malfoy. She is very fair and the way you have been treated would have hurt her sense of fairness, relative or not. But as a relative and a person who wanted to even resign her job to take care of you, she feels betrayed and let down by Albus who did not listen to her objections and made you suffer.”

Harry was stunned. McGonagall wanted to resign her job to take care of him. He felt very warm inside all of a sudden as he looked up at Snape in wonder and smiled slightly at him. “I must thank her for wanting to do so.” He said softly, reveling in the feeling that someone other than Sirius was willing to take care of him and he instinctively knew that McGonagall would never ever see the Boy-who-Lived and he would always be Potter or Harry to her.

Snape though did not smile back at him, “I was a death eater Potter. I think you know that. I also turned from the side of Voldemort to Dumbledore offering myself as a spy.” Harry nodded bemused at where this was going.

"I was there at the Hog's Head the day Albus interviewed Trelawney." Snape said and fell silent. Harry looked puzzled only for a second before he jumped up his face flushing with anger and total betrayal and very horrified, "You, you..." Harry whispered before he stated shaking literally pouring magical energy everywhere affecting everything as his face turned red in scorn and sheer rage.

"You were the intruder weren't you? You were the reason Voldemort went after my parents'." Harry was shaking with anger as he realized that Snape was the reason that Voldemort was after him, the reason he was suffering so much.

All the things in the room started rattling as Harry's anger escalated. He looked at the man who was staring at him with an unreadable expression and Harry could have gladly killed him at that point. Snape had not even removed his wand to protect himself or do anything to calm Harry. The cups, plates and indeed everything was rattling very hard as there was no sound from Harry who was standing, his eyes flashing in anger as he looked at Snape and Snape who was sitting there his eyes unwavering on Harry.

The windows shattered first and then the cups, saucers and plates started breaking and falling down. The noise they made startled Harry out of his anger and he looked around distracted from the thought of killing Snape and the rattling stopped as he looked around and slowly registered what had happened around him.

"You killed my parents Snape. Tell me one good reason why I should not kill you?" Harry asked him very coldly.

"No reason Potter, you may go right ahead and I will not defend myself." Snape sat tight looking up at Harry calmly. Harry glared at him his whole body shaking with suppressed anger, sadness and a host of so many emotions all of them very violent ripping through him.

"Why did you report that to Voldemort? It was because of that my parents' died; Sirius was in Azkaban for thirteen years and my mum, dad and Sirius are not here today to talk for me, be there for me, no one Snape, and no one for me.

“It was because of that I was shoved into a cupboard, and because of that I was the Dursleys’ house elf, the Wizarding World’s insane attention seeking idiot and Dumbledore’s weapon. Ickle Harry has to take down Voldemort and then he has to die because he was unfortunate to be born with a silver aura and he was stupid to defeat Voldemort on the strength of his mother’s sacrifice. You have had your revenge for what my dad and Sirius did to you in fifth year don’t you? ***You must be so happy. Why did you Snape? Why did you? Why did you? I am asking you damn it...***”

Harry was shouting at the top of his voice at that point and on the last word he broke, huge sobs broke out and his body heaved with the sorrow that completely overwhelmed him. The whole cottage that had been rattling ominously as Harry had been yelling at Snape now settled down as Harry covered his face in his hands and cried for the first time in his living memory, like a child.

Harry crumpled to the floor as he cried. The stupid actions of one man had started the demolition of his and his family’s entire life. Snape who had been looking at Harry with an unreadable expression for the most part on the outside, felt his whole being crumble inside as Harry shouted at him and he had become white and pale with guilt as he acknowledged all that Harry had said was true.

It was the one mistake that had led to the death of the Potters and sent Black to Azkaban and had been responsible for Harry’s miserable life until now. He got up and went to the weeping boy and sat down before him and put his arms around him and pulled Harry to him.

Harry stiffened for a second and tried to pull away but Snape held him firmly and then Harry did not care as he wept for his parents and Sirius and himself. A long while later Harry’s sobs stopped, though he heaved with the amount of crying and grieving that he had done.

All this while Snape had just held him silently, slowly stroking his back and squeezing his shoulders. Harry and Snape sat there for the rest of the day just like that as each was holding on to the other for what they did not know, but shockingly and surprisingly very comfortable

with it and both of them did not make any move to get out of holding each other.

It was around dinner time that Snape broke the silence after Harry's shouting.

"You are right Potter. It was that one act among so many other despicable acts that I have done in the service of the Dark Lord that spoiled your entire life." he began softly holding Harry firmly. Harry was so tired with his crying he was just lying with his head on Snape's shoulder and when Snape began to speak, Harry just stiffened a little, but stayed where he was, very silent, not saying a word in acknowledgement or anger.

"I joined the death eaters to get my own back against the world that I felt in my supreme ignorance and ego filled stature, had been pretty unkind to me. My mother had died in the holidays of fifth year and I went home to find that my home had been locked and shut down.

"My father had not seen it fit to even tell me she had died just two weeks before School closed for the summer and she was already buried by the time I had got home. The street house was in her name and she had willed it to me and my father had left to go and live with another woman whom he had been with for a long time.

"I abhorred him and he hated me as I was magical. He beat my mother and tortured her almost everyday and she did not have the luxury of escape like I did once I was eleven years old. What was shocking to me at the time was that she made no effort to leave my father even when he would sometimes bring women home.

"She put up with everything patiently and almost never ventured out and never spoke an unkind word to me. She tried to protect me as much as she could from my father's abuse and when I got home and found her dead and my father alive and kicking I was so furious I would have killed him if not for the fact I knew my mother never wanted him harmed.

"She took a promise from me when I was in my third year. My father had beaten her so much one day that I was furious and had planned to kill him with a potion as I could not use my wand, and pleaded with

me and asked me to never harm him as she loved him and if he did not love her that was all right with her.

“Today I can see that she was very weak mentally and she did not have the will to fight against my father, but then I felt disgusted and I vowed that no one would have control over me like that. What a fool I was and how wrong.

“I was not happy but I could not go against her. She was a witch and a powerful one. She had been to Hogwarts and was in Slytherin and her family was as pure blood as the Malfoys, Blacks or yours Potter. Your father’s side, I mean. She could have cast the harmony charm, she could have even cast the imperious and made my father a human being instead of a sick animal, but she never did and she always endured his violence.

“That year, the year my mother died I joined the death eaters along with Lucius Malfoy and the other Slytherins including Regulus Black who was my best friend and the only one who had a fair idea about my home as he came from a similar background. Only both his parents were equally bad. Sirius Black had Potter and he was already an outcast because he was sorted into Gryffindor but Regulus had no one.

“While he did not hate the muggles as I did, he desperately craved acceptance from his parents’, an acceptance he was never blessed to have. We related surprisingly well with each other and bonded with each other in secret as Black and your father did openly.

“I became a death eater and it was my way of making sure that wizards and muggles never mixed and our world was as safe as could be from people like Tobias Snape. But what a disappointment Regulus and I were in for. It was no grand scheme to rule the Wizarding World or tackle the muggles as the Dark Lord said, no equanimity among the death eaters, nothing. The Dark Lord was very paranoid and the slightest doubt or suspicion, we would be tortured and cursed.

“The harsh truth was the fact that we were slaves, nothing more than slaves, ordered to do as he said and no mind or in fact no life to call our own. Regulus and I were desperate. We could not talk against the

Dark Lord to anyone. We would not be accepted in mainstream society as well and in short we had had no hope.

“We hated Dumbledore with a passion as he was the hypocritical ass who turned so many Slytherins towards the Dark Lord. Regulus was an empath and he was forever telling me, warning me and anyone who would listen in Slytherin to beware of him. Reg always caught bad vibes from him. He told your Godfather as well, but Black would simply not listen.

“What I had suffered from a member of my family and what I swore to myself will never happen only not to me but to other half blood children like me was a joke as now I was in the clutches of a man who was a maniac and more than a thousand times worse than my father and taking the mark ensured I would never be free of the Dark Lord, unlike with my father whom I never saw after casting an impotent charm on his privates so that he would never enjoy that aspect of his life ever again.

“He cheated on my mother when she was alive, but after her death he would stay faithful to her. I felt the punishment was just.”

Harry raised his head at that. Snape smiled wryly at him and then as Harry laid his head on Snape's shoulder Snape continued slowly stroking Harry's hair and removing the slight tangles in them almost unconsciously, his turbulent thoughts a million miles away. Snape really did not know why he was unburdening himself to Potter but as he spoke he felt clean, refreshed and he felt as if a huge burden was rolling off his back, making him feel so light inside.

“The two years I was in School was bearable as we had these horrible meetings only during the holidays, but once I finished School it was terrible. My passion was potions and I felt so humiliated when the Dark Lord would want me to brew them to give them to hapless muggles that would make them behave in eccentric ways, I was mortified.

“But what could I do and where could I go? There was no place that would grant me refugee from the Dark Lord. It was at that time Reg and I went to the Hog's Head in the autumn of 1979. Your parents had been married the week before and Reg and I were deputed to

spy on Dumbledore. I went in with only basic hiding charms, while Reg was truly hiding.

“We always operated like that, only the two of us, not the death eaters, I mean.”

Harry nodded his head, snuggling even more deeply as he listened raptly to a story, he suspected no one knew. Snape squeezed his shoulders in comfort as he continued.

“I never expected to hear anything in the first place, but imagine my shock, when I heard the Prophecy coming out of her lips. That was when Aberforth saw me hiding and threw me out. But he did not see Reg as Reg had concealed his aura and everything; like you did that time at the Order meeting and he heard the whole thing.

“I waited for the interview to get over and Reg to come out of hiding. What he told me was astounding. Both of us were jubilant as we realized there would soon be born a soul that would actually relive us from this hell. As Reg told me that even if we died somehow, we would know that the Dark Lord would soon meet his fate as well.

“We were in high spirits that day and we told only the first half of the Prophecy to him, telling him that I was found out and Reg was watching my back waiting for me behind Hog’s Head. The Dark Lord did not even punish us for bringing a half Prophecy and nor did he look in our minds. Occlumency was the first thing I had learnt along with Reg once we realized we were not loyal or true death eaters and we were confident we could withstand his mental assault.

“Then the Dark Lord ordered me to secure a position in Hogwarts, but I was not successful that year, that is I did not land the job in 1980. The Dark Lord was most displeased and told me that I should somehow get into Hogwarts and that was when Reg suggested that I should appear disillusioned with what I was and go there offering my services as a spy.

“The Dark Lord agreed at once and I was to try in the autumn of 1980 to become a professor somehow by the summer of 1981.

“I was happy with that as Reg and I were working in secret on bringing down the Dark Lord and making the way as easy as we could for the Prophecy child. We carefully watched all the Light and the Dark families and saw potential candidates in your parents and the Longbottoms, whom we came to know, were scheduled to deliver in the month of July.

“Both of thought it would be the Longbottoms as your mother though a powerful witch was not a pureblood. In the meanwhile, Reg and I were working on the secret project. The Dark Lord in order to achieve immortality had resorted to Black magic and had created what are known as horcruxes.

“A horcrux is a piece of soul that a witch or wizard willfully separates from his oversoul and places it in a previously prepared container that has powerful magical protective enchantments. To rip a piece of your soul you must first rip another of his soul or in other words you must kill someone, anyone.”

Harry looked up sharply at that. “Sir then if I kill Voldemort...”

“You will hopefully receive an Order of Merlin First Class and the gratitude of this undeserving Wizarding World. Potter to create a horcrux you have to kill and perform the ritual that is a chant, which will split your soul and the split part, will reside in its container till such time you need it. You will of course need it once you are killed, but you cannot die in the normal sense as you are not fully dead. A part of you after all is still in this world.”

Harry drew a sharp breath and sat up straight at that. Snape nodded as he saw the comprehension in Harry’s eyes. “So that is what Voldemort did.” Snape nodded once again and then stopped as Harry blushed violently. He frowned as he could not understand the reason for it until Harry looked down and mumbled, “can I sit the way I was before?”

Snape did not understand for a second and then he felt very shocked at the warm feeling that swept through him and filled him completely inside and out and he did not answer the young boy in front of him, but instead pulled him closer till Harry once again leaned on him.

“Reg managed to find one of them. It was in a cave by the seaside. He found it by accident; he had heard Bellatrix and her husband talking about it and after Bellatrix left to go elsewhere he gave a rambling potion to Rudolphus and got the information out of him. Both of us went to the cave and I stood a little distance away to keep watch and Reg entered with Kreacher and retrieved the locket and placed a false one in its place.

“That night we destroyed it. But the Dark Lord had made six and he was going to make the seventh as seven is the magically most powerful number, with the death of the child of the Prophecy, Rudolphus’s news again. We were so thrilled and happy that we had defeated him on one count.

“There was a long way to go, but both Reg and I felt we should never give up and work harder to make things easier for the Prophecy Child to allow him to fulfill the Prophecy in a manner that would mean the ultimate death of the Dark Lord.

“A few weeks after that you were born a day later than Longbottom and Reg told me it would be you. I was hoping it would not, as I had personal issues with your father and Black, while with Longbottom I had no such issues. But as Reg pointed out it was you who was born as the seventh month dies not him.

“What we did not know was that the Dark Lord had somehow found out that Reg had been to the cave. It was our misfortune that a death eater who was standing guard at a place a little away from the cave spotted Reg and the elf when Reg had to make him self visible to open the entrance. The Dark Lord had no clue about me or about the identity of the elf but Reg had been seen and recognized and that sealed his fate.

“It was on the day of Imbolc that the Dark Lord made his move. He announced that Potter was the child of the Prophecy and he had gained a very close friend of the Potters as his man and once all his plans were in place he would move against Harry Potter.

“Both Reg and I decided to warn your parents through Black. But he was not destined to warn Black or indeed anyone as the only person who looked at me without repugnance and loathing and bonded with

me as my brother was tortured and killed. The Dark Lord,” Snape’s voice trembled and he shivered as he remembered the horrifying events of so long ago that still stood in his mind as if it had happened yesterday.

Harry shifted a little and now placed his arms around Snape’s shoulders and held him tight, pouring feelings of calm in his touch. Snape trembled a little more as he tried to find his voice and tell Harry about Reg’s torture.

“The Dark Lord,” whispered Snape once more, “the Dark Lord told everyone that Reg had been meddling in his business and traitors should be punished. He asked Reg about the horcrux and Reg told him he had destroyed it and sealed his death at that moment in the worst way possible. The stupid boy took everything on himself to save me and admitted his guilt pretending he was working with his brother in secrecy.

Snape swallowed and paused for a while and then continued softly, “the Dark Lord mind-raped him first, but could not find anything, he was furious as a result and he started by breaking Reg’s bones one by one, enervating Reg every time he fainted. When it looked that Reg would die of pain, he stopped breaking his bones, not that many were left and started placing small but deep cuts that were cast along with another spell that was for inducing pain. Reg died when the Dark Lord cut his privates with that spell.

“I stood there wanting to rush and fall on him save him or die with him, but I could not; could not let him die in vain, could not let his death mean so little; so I watched him with a smile on my face along with the others and clapped my hand and raised my wand as the traitor died all the while weeping inside for my first and only friend, brother and family that I had ever known, who cared for this greasy git as his very own.

Two lonely tears came down his cheeks as he spoke softly to a horrified Harry who was trembling with the shock of what he was hearing, “that was the day, Potter that I turned to Dumbledore.

“I went to him with the information of a spy in his inner circle and simply told him the Dark Lord’s orgies were not to my taste. I

promised on my magic and gave him a wizard's oath that I will help Harry James Potter to the best of my ability and even die if needed for his sake, so that he may fulfill the Prophecy. Only then Dumbledore believed me and helped me and offered me a position of the Head of Slytherin and the job of potions professor.

Harry looked at shock at the man he had hated with every fiber of his being only a few hours ago. Harry did not think, he reacted on instinct and hugging Snape tightly he told him in very clear tones, "I swear on my magic to protect you Snape; you will never be alone from now on until I die. You will be my family and I will be yours.

A swirl of golden magic came from Harry and enveloped both of them as Snape wiped his eyes and gaped at him, "Potter, what are you saying? You are swearing an oath, you stupid child. I will not accept,"

"So you don't want me," Harry moved a little away from him feeling let down, though he did not know why, just because they had been opening their hearts, it did not mean that Snape would want him, he was such a fool. He opened his mouth to say it was okay but before he could say anything there was a small whisper.

"I accept, you stupid, idiotic, ignoramus, beautiful, brilliant child of mine." The next second he was smothered by a huge hug from Harry. The golden swirl fully covered both of them and entered both of them; leaving then very contented, in fact extremely contented for the way they were feeling a few minutes before.

"I don't want your pity Harry, I may call you that I suppose and you may call me Severus when we are alone or when we are with Minerva, hmm? That was why I hesitated." Snape looked at Harry intently.

"Hey, you are not getting any." Harry tried to respond lightly and then leaning against Snape he said quietly, "Of course I feel and feel terribly for you and Regulus. The Black brothers are singularly unlucky aren't they? Both of them made mistakes, Regulus became a death eater to make his dad proud and Sirius wanted to save my dad and made that slimy rat the secret keeper. It makes my blood boil that both of them paid a little too much for their mistakes."

Snape nodded his head. His mind was still swirling with the oath Harry had taken. For the first time in fifteen years he felt young and bright and hopeful for the future.

“Come,” he told Harry getting up and removing the knots in his body by the simple process of stretching and then he held his hand for Harry to take.

Snape was even at that time thinking about his decision to speak out and tell this boy his story, he still did not know why he did it, but seeing Harry’s memories had opened a dam inside him, bringing all the old memories back, memories of despair, memories of sorrow and he realized he had identified so completely with Harry, that he was able to tell him all this.

Harry as he took Snape’s hand felt complete, this was day he would cherish forever and he knew Snape would as well. He had been horrified at what Snape had to go through in his life and Harry had bled inside as he could understand the depths of sorrow and helplessness that he felt even after so many years for his best friend.

He felt he was doing the right thing by taking the oath for Snape and he knew his parents and Sirius would only feel happy for him. For the first time after Sirius fell into the veil, Harry was able to truly smile and think of his Godfather without feeling miserable. He had begun to heal.

They were silent each in their own thoughts as they prepared a meal, the time was long past midnight and peeping towards the dawn but both of them feeling a bit too hungry and restless to sleep and so they cooked and decided to have a full meal. They worked together in companionable silence and then ate their food and put the dishes away and they took turns to wash and change.

Snape sighed as Harry came to sit on his bed smiling, “Feeling tired? Go to sleep and we will start the preparations for the war tomorrow.”

Snape nodded. “Yes, Harry. We must not only train but also plan not only for the war but also the aftermath. It will be the aftermath that will be truly frightening.”

He pulled Harry towards him and gently kissed him on his forehead.
“Sleep well, child and sleep late. We will continue in the morning.
Good night.”

Harry hugged him and whispering his own goodnight went to bed
feeling very contented.

End of Chapter – 9

Chapter – 10

Harry woke up to the aroma of tea, toast, roast potatoes and stew, all mingling together and making his mouth water. He woke up to see Snape busy preparing a huge meal. Harry cast the tempus and saw it was almost afternoon. He jumped out of bed and raced to the bathroom shouting a good afternoon to Snape who answered with a 'come soon, food is ready'.

Harry was out clean and fresh in ten minutes. He did not go to the table where Snape was waiting for him, but to the trunk to remove the parchment and came back to the table. "To write Hermione, I will not tell her anything of yesterday, Severus, but that I did not get into trouble with you and I am on my way to understanding Occlumency and you."

Snape nodded his head, eating his own meal, his eyes shining with amusement at Harry's enthusiasm when he spoke of the Granger girl. So there was something there. He put it away to tackle him about it later and watched as Harry wrote on the parchment, eating well, chomping his food away at the same time.

How had yesterday happened in the first place astounded Snape? But he was not going to look into that. He was going to be immensely grateful for the lifeline and another opportunity that life had given him and make sure that this time around what had happened with Reg would not happen with Harry.

Harry in the meantime had written a short note to Hermione reassuring her he was fine.

Hey, I am sorry I could not write all of yesterday as Snape had woken up and I was busy with him. Snape was not angry at all, he was very surprised though and Hermione you will be shocked to know that Snape and I understood each other pretty well. He is on the up Hermione, I will tell you more in person, but I know you are going to think I am under the imperious or something, but Snape is very decent and he has promised to teach me Occlumency in a way I will master it easily.

I will write later, all right?

Harry waited for about two minutes before the words started appearing.

Merlin Harry, I have been having kittens here. Thank god, thank god really that you are fine. I have been imagining all kinds of things the worst scenario being that Snape had found out and dragged you off to Dumbledore and the best was that you had made Snape unconscious once again giving perhaps three more days. Now I am relieved and I can start studying again. Don't do this again. If not anything from today onwards I want you to write 'I am okay' when you go to bed, if you don't have time to write during the day. I will read that and will know you are fine. Okay?

Harry read all this aloud to Snape whose suspicions were more or less confirmed.

"She really has you where she wants you doesn't she Potter?" he asked Harry smirking at him, amusement shining in his black eyes that were full of warmth.

Harry blushed as he understood the implications of what Snape was telling him and scowled at him. "You couldn't be more wrong Snape," he tried to drawl, but it came out very awkward and Harry sounded silly even to his own ears, as he blushed more. Snape could not control himself as Harry huffed and he laughed aloud, making Harry scowl at his warped sense of humor and he hastily scribbled a '*fine, will do that got to go*' on the parchment and got up as stately as he could and went to keep it safely.

"It is not very funny, you know, she was attracted to Ron in that way not me." Harry told him sternly wondering why he felt so bad about it. She was his best friend that was all wasn't she? Then why did he feel so bad about her thinking of Ron in that way?

Snape was still smiling as they washed the dishes together in a companionable silence.

Snape thought as he washed and dried the dishes along with Harry that he was smiling in a way he never had after Reg and he realized

how much he had missed this kind of conversation in the last so many years. He looked at Harry who seemed to be deep in thought, most likely about Hermione Granger and called him down to earth to start off on everything.

"While you were sleeping," Snape told him as they went to the sofa and sat down, well, Snape sat down on the sofa and Harry threw himself on the ground, resting his back on the sofa opposite to where Snape was sitting, "I took the liberty of calling Minerva to come here and discuss the next step in your training and also talk about the Order, the death eaters and the Wizarding World in general."

Harry nodded. "Yeah," he said and then curiously, "What were you planning to teach me?"

Snape smiled, "All the things I wanted to teach you before now Harry, only now I will do it in depth and before Minerva comes there are two things I wish to do. One is to see your books, especially by this Canogahn, as I do not recognize the name and nor does Minerva. The second thing which we will do first, that is now is to finish your Occlumency lessons."

Harry pouted, "Please Severus, I swear I will start with the stupid Occlumency from tomorrow. Please, please give me an off today." Harry begged him, looking hopefully at Snape.

"Silly, I haven't finished. What I was going to say before I was interrupted was that if you will not mind I will create a mind link with you and build your walls. Then all you have to do is to strengthen them continuously by meditation, which I will teach you. With constant practice, the shields will become a part of you and will start operating subconsciously sensing your need at any given moment."

Harry blinked at that. Then he smiled.

"What are we waiting for?" He grinned at Snape who rolled his eyes, "well now we don't have to wait till tomorrow for the stupid Occlumency hmm?"

St they started. Snape instructed Harry to look straight into his eyes. "Now Harry," he said softly wanting to impress on the boy how

important this was, "Harry you must promise me that you will make a sincere effort at occluding your mind. While what Dumbledore said was in very bad taste the meaning of what he tried to imply still holds good. The Dark Lord will stoop down to any level and I wish for you to make sure that what happened before will never happen ever again."

Harry nodded seriously. "Yes, I will Severus. You just tell me what to do and how and I will practice whenever I can, day or night."

"Good." Snape smiled satisfied at Harry's answer and he whispered, "Legilimens."

Snape was very easily in Harry's mind and Harry was there as well. "May I start with the memories? Come to me and let me hold you, some of them may be painful after all." He ordered Harry, who immediately went to his side and Snape had his arm around Harry's shoulder.

"Now how would you want your memories separated? Good, bad and ugly would be one way. Home, School and other would be another. Order, death eaters and other would be still another way."

"What about Order, death eaters, Hogwarts, Dursleys and others?"

Snape smiled sadly at Harry. Apart from 'others' the rest was purely bad memories. He nodded his head, not saying anything and got to work. He asked Harry to contribute to the art work and they began. Harry turned his mind into huge caverns like his vaults at Gringotts and Snape started sifting through his mind.

They went through the relatively less painful ones of his time with the Dursleys and Snape wondered at the endurance the boy had. With all this baggage he should have already been a Dark Lord, instead here he was struggling to put his pain away, getting up on his feet and still working to defeat Voldemort and trying his best to be happy with what he had, which was very little.

A surge of protectiveness swept Snape away for a minute as he tightened his arms at Harry who was looking rather sadly at his younger self as he was being yelled at by his aunt and trying to dodge her pan at the same time.

They worked together for almost three hours, before Snape noticed Harry trying hard not look upset by what he was seeing, which was his aunt brushing off the large bruise he had from Dudley hunting on his elbow that was bleeding rather badly.

His aunt was accusing him of being whiney and told him very brusquely to clean the wound with water from the bathroom as the blood was making a mess on the floor. "You come back straight here and clean the mess you have made on this floor, boy."

Harry's eyes looked shocked and full of hurt as he replied softly, "Yes Aunt Petunia."

They had come up to his seventh year and it was taking all of Snape's restraint not to yell at the Dursleys. He decided he had a visit to make and he would take Minerva along with him. Yes, he was sure he could do something to make the punishment fit the crime. Harry was so small and the things they had made them do, well Snape was itching for his wand.

He hugged Harry who smiled at him self loathing evident in his voice, "I am being such a wimp aren't I?"

Snape brushed the untidy hair off his face, "No, Harry. They are the pathetic ones. They have lost a wonderful person. Well their loss is my gain. You would not have bonded with me if they had been nice to you would you?"

Harry almost crushed him with his hug. All he said though was, "Thanks Severus." with a brilliant smile on his face and Snape smiled back as he went out of Harry's mind, though not before telling Harry and teaching him the basic exercises to do.

Both of them opened their eyes to see McGonagall sitting on the other sofa and watching them happily. Harry saw her and he smiled at her a little shyly. "Thank you professor," he said looking down for a second and then looking up and smiling slightly at her, "for willing to resign your job, and wanting custody of me and willing to take care of me when my parents' died."

She was amazed, "Harry how did you know? Oh," she turned to Snape with more amazement and astonishment. When had Severus and Harry become so close that Severus would reveal information of this type to Harry. She made a note to self to ask Snape later as she smiled at him.

"I would have loved to take care of you Harry. Unfortunately I failed not only you but your parents and your grandparents in allowing you with those muggles. I was convinced at the time that living with them was in your best interests as you would be protected by your mother's sacrifice. Now," she paused not knowing how much Snape had revealed.

"Yeah, I know professor, Severus told me though not in detail." Harry nodded to McGonagall and turned enquiringly to Snape. McGonagall's jaw hit the floor and Snape was actually laughing at her shock. Harry looked bewildered as he hadn't realized he had called Snape by name.

"What, did I say anything funny?" he asked Snape who chuckled once more as he shook his head.

"You called me by name." Harry looked blank for a minute and then he smiled at McGonagall and shrugged, "Well he told me I can do so when we are alone and when you are there. Sorry if I shocked you."

McGonagall grinned, she actually grinned wickedly at Harry, "Now why should I mind you calling him by name. It will do him a world of good to smile and laugh a bit more. It is very apparent he cares about you." And she laughed as Snape scowled at her remarks which in his opinion were a bit too mushy for him. Looking at Harry who was looking very embarrassed, Snape knew that he too felt the same.

Snape spluttered with indignation, "Minerva I am very afraid you are delusional. Old age has finally caught up with you. Severus Snape doesn't do caring for Gryffindors' Golden Boys, pah!" He said as loftily as he could and Harry was reduced to giggling at his professors. Snape glared at Harry and as Harry continued to smile widely, he too smiled reluctantly at him.

McGonagall looked at the display of pure affection in Snape's face and the answering response in Harry's and felt choked with happiness as two of her students'; former and present had found each other. Both of them had been abused and lonely and had been denied so much. She prayed that the happiness of today would last all their lives and together the three of them would triumph over all obstacles.

She had wanted to take Harry in, but it looked as if Severus had already let Harry into the core of his being.

"Harry would you like to call Granger as well? The four of us know everything and I would like her to be adept in Occlumency as well. It would be most important and she could learn along with you and be well prepared."

Harry's grin that stretched from ear to ear was the answer. He ran to the trunk to fetch the parchment as McGonagall looked at Snape raising her eyebrows. Snape gave a slight nod and turned to Harry as he returned with the parchment.

Hermione are you there? I want to ask you something terribly important.

The answer came almost at once as Hermione was reading in her room and had spotted the words on the parchment that was in front of her.

I am very much here Harry. What is it?

Would you like to come over and study with me? Snape knows everything and McGonagall is also here and are willing to help us. Don't panic and it is very much on the up. What do you say?

There was no answer for almost five minutes and Harry was getting very jittery when the answer came.

Of course Harry. I will come. I went to ask for permission and mother says it's all right provided I return home for dinner.

Great Hermione, Snape will open the floo to your home. I will pop in first and then bring you over here. Is that fine with you?

Fine, Harry. Come right over.

Harry waited only for Snape to adjust the wards and then, threw a pinch of the floo into the merrily crackling fire and put his head inside. Hermione was waiting with a gun that pointed straight at his face, her hands and her whole body trembling with her eyes full of terror. He gaped and stared at her open mouthed at that.

“Hermione,” he gasped incredulously and then suddenly he came out and fell into her room as she ran to him and pulled him through. She immediately ran to him and hugged him, “Oh Harry, did Snape torture you through Legilimency. Don’t worry. We can go and hide in one of your houses until you train and oh Harry I am so glad you escaped.”

“Wait, wait Hermione,” Harry was so bewildered by the hysterical friend in front of him he did not know what to do. “What are you saying? Why did you point that gun at me? What happened to you?”

“She got scared that you were under the imperious or something you git.” Snape’s voice came very dryly from the fireplace, where he and McGonagall were uncomfortable perched, watching them with great interest.

Hermione squealed and went to stand in front of Harry, protecting him as she heard Snape’s voice and it was her turn to gape open mouthed when she saw McGonagall as well and she stared unable to understand anything at both her professors whose heads were poking through the fire. It was a bit too much for her as she had thought that Harry had been brainwashed or put under the imperious by Snape and was prepared to shoot her way out and rescue him.

Both the heads withdrew and before Hermione could turn to Harry, McGonagall came through the floo and explained everything briefly to her. She blushed as she thought of the gun and she turned very sheepishly to Harry. “Sorry,” was all she said before Harry hugged her and held a second longer than he had to, “That was brilliant of you Hermione. Brilliant. Thanks a lot.”

“That was why I took the time. I could not use a wand, but I could always say later that the murder was in self defense.” She shrugged, still embarrassed by her actions.

Harry looked at her a gamut of emotions running through him, amazement, gratitude, admiration and so many others and together with all of these emotions he felt very humbled as he realized she was willing to kill a man to save him. He hugged her once again whispering his gratitude to her. She blushed prettily and smacked him on his arm.

“Oh do keep quiet Harry. It was no big thing. I know you would have done this and more for me. Now you go back and I will call up my parents’ and then come with you.”

Hermione called up her parents’ and told them everything and they agreed to let her go and she was soon in the cottage and sitting on the floor with Harry.

McGonagall started the conversation.

“Tell us about the wards, Severus? Will Voldemort find out about it if he comes looking and will Harry be safe there?”

“As I told you Minerva, blood wards need an acceptance that has to be voluntary. You told me Harry was left on the steps in the night; a whole day had passed where we do not know where or with whom Harry was. It could be the day Dumbledore bound Harry’s powers’ and gifts and left him on the doorsteps with a bloody letter.” Snape’s lips thinned with anger.

Albus had not the courtesy to even ask the Dursleys or inform them in person of the Potter’s deaths. McGonagall scowled as well as she thought back to those days.

“We do not know what was written in that letter. Probably Albus went back later and placed a compulsion spell on them or forced them by frightening them to take charge of Harry. But they are not blood wards. Harry would have been safe in any of his own properties or with you with a blood ritual, there were so many alternatives.”

All of them were silent as they thought of the fact Harry had spent so many years abused and unwanted on the whims of one man. Snape especially was very angry as he had just seen what Harry had gone through with his so called blood relatives. He cleared his throat once again bringing all of them out of their thoughts.

"Now what I think is we must take care of the Dark Lord first, his death eaters next before dealing with Albus bloody Dumbledore. We need the Order much as we dislike it to help us in dealing with the death eaters and then ultimately Voldemort. In that time we must change many things, first of all the perception that Harry is Dumbledore's man only. We have to make Harry independent and also ensure that he is forever out of the loop of the manipulations." Snape frowned thoughtfully as he spoke turning various things in his mind.

"Dumbledore will never allow for it Severus," Minerva was at her most disdainful, "allowing Harry to be free, away from his control? Never and if he even suspects something, he will take action against us and Harry. From now on in fact, Severus you should make sure that everyone is always assured of the fact that you dislike James's child. If Albus ever suspects otherwise, he could threaten you with the dark mark. He could throw you to the Ministry, he could and now we know he would do anything." She finished bitterly.

Harry nodded his head vigorously, looking very startled and worried at that. "Severus, we must not do anything that could make you the scapegoat. That will never do. What professor McGonagall says is also true. Dumbledore will never allow me to go far away from him and at this time I am not very wise to go against him."

Hermione looked startled as did McGonagall, but Snape was looking very thoughtfully at Harry. "What do you mean Harry?" he asked looking very interested in the answer Harry would give.

"Severus, at this time I think we should not give any clue or suspicion to Dumbledore or Moody about my aura, strength or that our group here knows everything. In fact that way I think we may be able to gain more time. He said he will not allow the final clash with Voldemort to occur till I reach seventeen and take formal control of my vaults and

his, well I mean him, Sirius.” He stopped there a bit choked up and then valiantly continued,

“So he will try and break me as much as possible to get my magic all worked up and at the next time I meet with Voldemort once I am seventeen, he would probably come along with me and release my magic at the last moment and then watch with a sad smile as both of us went down.”

“Only the Dark Lord won’t go down as he has created horcruxes and unless we destroy them he will keep coming back.” Snape finished as McGonagall gasped in horror.

“Severus what are you saying? You-Know-Who has created horcruxes?” she was actually trembling with fear as Snape nodded his head. Harry turned to Hermione and told her about then and she too was filled with horror and fear as she realized just how enormous their already huge task had become.

“Minerva, get your self together. How else did you think a dead man could come to life after thirteen years?” Snape asked her sharply.

She shook her head as if trying to come out of the fear Snape’s words had given her, “I am sorry Severus. I was totally unnerved and just about lost it there for a second. How did you know?”

Snape’s lips tightened for a second as he thought of Regulus and his wasted life. “I overheard Minerva, not now but before the Dark Lord fell. The Diary that Harry destroyed in his second year was one of them. That was how it managed to get possession of the Weasley girl. Another one was destroyed as well. I... heard about it too; it was a locket belonging to Slytherin. Now what I do not know is if he has created more or we have only three more to destroy before killing him as he was to have made the seventh with the killing of Harry and we all know how that went.”

McGonagall put her hand over her mouth at the enormity of the task in front of them and they were only four of them here who were up against the Light, Dark, the Ministry and well, against everyone. She looked at Severus, her eyes conveying the concern about the task

that lay upon this boy who was destined to fight all of these people with only two witches and one wizard to help him.

Snape nodded his head as he understood what she was so worried about. But this was not the time to panic. At least they had been given some vital information and the time to train Harry and plan their moves. Also they knew about the horcruxes; that was a plus. He turned to Harry.

“You are absolutely right Harry. In fact we should do all the things I said before, but in secret and bide our time and deal with the Dark Lord first. Let me finish Minerva,” as McGonagall was about to interrupt again, “Harry must learn and learn fast not only about offensive and defensive magic but also wizarding politics and work his way up the ladder so that he not only knows how to recognize manipulation but also to deal with it swiftly and efficiently.”

McGonagall nodded thoughtfully. What Snape was saying made a lot of sense.

“The debacle at the Department of Mysteries where the Dark Lord failed to kill Harry and Albus has made him very frustrated. He has sent all of us away; those in the public eye, like me, Rookwood, McNair, Avery and Malfoy. That was how I have got almost two months to spend here. Well, we must not waste a minute more and do as much as we can before the Dark Lord starts calling and I am not able to be here continuously.”

All of them nodded at that and Hermione went back to her home with McGonagall to talk her parents’ into taking a holiday in France, where Hermione had been before and she could manage any questions that may arise about her trip.

The Grangers’ had been planning to go on a holiday when Hermione left for Grimmauld Place and so not much persuasion was needed to make them go a bit early. Hermione would live with McGonagall in the night and come everyday to the cottage with her and learn along with Harry from Snape and McGonagall.

McGonagall herself finished her duties in School in about two days and casually went off for a well deserved holiday. She had created a

special room that was off her bedroom for Hermione and had completely sealed that room. That meant there was only the wall if anyone would by chance happen to enter her bedroom.

Though the chance of anyone doing that was highly unlikely, she was not taking any risks. There was a floo in Hermione's room that connected her to the cottage and that was the only way in and out of that room. Not even McGonagall could enter Hermione's room from her bedroom once she had sealed the door with a wall. That way she ensured no one would know of her presence even if they flooded to her house and happened to enter her bedroom at any point.

Satisfied with all the arrangements made so far and after Hermione came bag and baggage to her 'room'; she would fine going to the cottage in the morning and staying there through the day and going back to her room late at night.

Snape and Harry had been busy working out schedules and had already started their studies. They continued with the Occlumency lessons and Snape felt wanting to meet the Dursleys and show them the real reason of why a muggle had to fear a wizard. He also kept trying to persuade Harry to stop giving the money to them, but Harry was adamant about it.

Occlumency was practiced for about three hours a day and the rest of the time Harry started studying about his gifts and harnessing his magic. Snape, Hermione and even McGonagall had drooled over the book case of Artemus Canogahn and Snape had straight away asked Harry to start with four subjects at once.

The Dark Arts, Blood Magic, Runes and Parsel Magic were the subjects Snape asked him to start off on. He added aura sight to it as well, though Harry would get to practice only on three persons at the present. What Harry and Hermione did in the evening practical class with a wand, Snape asked Harry to try it at once wandlessly? He did not stress Harry to get the wandless spells right away as he knew that would be difficult if not impossible at present, but he asked Harry to try so that he would get the hang of it.

As Harry was practicing first and second year spells with McGonagall wandlessly, he would soon get these spells as well. Now it was

merely to understand the incantations and the flicks and also try the various spells mentally and without flicking his hand.

The unlocking of his magic and gifts made Harry read, memorize and understand everything much faster than usual. His capacity for retention was also so much better than before and soon he would be able to come on par with Hermione.

They started their day early in the morning and fell into their beds late at night, completely exhausted, but learning so much and the closeness that all of them shared and the purpose for which they were putting in so much effort made everything worth their while.

McGonagall still attended meetings in Grimmauld Place and came back with all sorts of news. Harry had received the information that Remus was like this because of the wolf grieving for Sirius and the man in him could not reconcile with the wolf and was desperately trying to convince the wolf, very impassively, but felt just a little bit better inside, as he realized that Remus had spoken like that because of an uncontrollable creature that was in him. Snape though had snorted and had muttered something uncomplimentary about werewolves and their stupidity.

Harry could understand that Remus was not in control of the wolf inside him and be able to forgive him but the wound that had been created by his words had cut a bit too deep and it would take Harry a very long time, if never to look at him as he did before.

End of Chapter – 10

Chapter – 11

The days went by swiftly and now Harry was beginning to get a good grasp of the Dark Arts and Blood Magic. He was still learning the basics, but was getting a good foundation on these difficult subjects. Hermione was years ahead of him in Runes having taken that class since third year, but in the Dark Arts and Blood Magic Harry was far advanced, mainly as his magic was compatible to them and hers was not.

In Runes, she had the advantage as Runic magic was one of her gifts as she had the advantage of two years of hard study compared to Harry. Nevertheless they had begun to understand the basic concepts of all magic. Dueling was Harry's favorite and while he could never defeat Snape or McGonagall, he could push them to their limit simply by the sheer power in his spell casting.

Harry was beginning to see auras once in a while clearly, but hazily all the time if he wanted to. He was concentrating as Snape told him and made him read texts on that as well, but this was one subject that was more practical than theory.

Snape would wake up Harry at five in the morning and they would walk around the mountains for an hour, sometimes talking softly about the Dark Lord, Dumbledore, the Order, School and even the Dursleys and Regulus and their plans for the future. At other times they would walk with the wind sometimes caressing them softly and sometimes whipping around them loudly whistling in glee that was very loud in the otherwise silence of the mountains a silence that was so content and peaceful with only the green mountains and the lovely lake that would reflect the mood of the wind at all times.

Both Harry and Snape cherished this time together; the time where there was only them and Mother Nature in all her glory. Harry especially connected to the wilderness and the peace and the calm the morning walks gave him, along with Snape when he could just be Harry without the pressures of Voldemort or the betrayal of Dumbledore, Ron and Ginny and Remus or the impending war weighing him down.

He loved it when Snape would put his arm around his shoulder as he giggled at something sarcastic and outrageous the potions master would say and he would revel in the singular attention that Snape would give him. That part of the day belonged to him and Snape and Harry was very jealous and possessive about it.

Snape had finished with the Occlumency shields in about a week, a week that was very painful and traumatic to both of them. Seeing these memories together also made them bond closer and healed Harry a bit. Snape though was reduced to a helpless anger most of the time and Harry healed a little every time he saw Snape's eyes shining and sometimes burning in anger for his sake.

Sirius and the Department of Mysteries was the hardest of them all and his memories of Sirius were very bittersweet for Harry, who openly cried and clung to Snape as he saw the open affection and concern in his Godfather's eyes and the final battle of his life when he was pushed into the veil. Harry was very bitter at the way Sirius had been treated by the people who should have ensured his freedom in the first place. Snape had held him once again and soothed him.

The Order was a bloody failure in Harry's opinion as they were not capable of knowing or finding out about the guilt or innocence of anyone. Sirius should have never gone to Azkaban, should have not needed to wait until his death for his name to be cleared.

A week before his birthday came their OWL results that had Harry and Hermione in a state of flustered nervousness. Hermione need not have been anxious at all as she cleared her OWLS and got an Outstanding in every subject except Defense against the Dark Arts. Harry failed History and Divination, got an Outstanding in DADA, an Exceeds Expectation in Transfiguration, Potions, Charms and Care of Magical Creatures and an Acceptable in Herbology and Astronomy.

On the 30th of July Harry waited until midnight for his birthday in a very happy frame of mind. He was lying on his bed and going through his shields automatically as was the case now-a-days, the process of continually strengthening them becoming spontaneous.

"Happy birthday Harry." Three voices sounded on the gong of midnight when Harry turned sixteen.

He turned sharply to see Snape, McGonagall and Hermione standing there, beaming at him. Well Hermione and McGonagall were beaming at him and Snape was smiling.

"Thanks." He beamed back as Hermione dragged him to the dinner table that now had four chairs instead of two and was enlarged at meal times. On the table was a small but beautiful chocolate cake with sixteen small candles on it.

Harry grinned happily at that and then blew out the candles and cut the cake and gave a piece to Hermione, Snape and McGonagall and then took a piece himself.

"It's great. Thanks a lot all of you, you needn't have bothered. Thanks, thanks a lot." He said shyly happiness radiating from his face at the first birthday cake and party he had in his life.

Hermione hugged him as did McGonagall. Snape threw an arm around him and handed him a gift that looked like it was a book. Harry tore open the gift to find it was a diary that had the words ***"Property of James Potter and Sirius Black. Whoever tries to open it may do so at their peril."***

He looked up in amazement at Snape. Snape shrugged. "I stole it from Potter a few weeks before we left School. It was funny the way they searched for it. But I could not open the book and so I never returned it. Now it belongs to you."

Harry gazed at the book in wonder. Then he took out his wand and said solemnly, "I promise I am up to no good." The book glowed for a moment and then lay still. Harry turned the cover and it opened harmlessly. He looked up grinning from ear to ear at Snape who was scowling at the stupid password, and crushed him. "Thank you so much. You have no idea what this means to me."

"Oh but I do Harry. I know just how much it would mean to you. That was why I gave this a birthday gift." Snape said softly his scowl all gone and his eyes shining as he saw Harry's happiness.

McGonagall had given him a complex book on transfiguration that was actually using basic and complex spells in battle. Harry thanked her and opened Hermione's gift that was also a book, though it was on runes.

All of them spent some time eating and chatting and then McGonagall and Hermione went to McGonagall's house.

"Harry today you get the day off. Both of us will come in at lunch time and we will plan an outing in disguise to Diagon Alley where we can look around and buy your School things at the same time. Severus?" McGonagall asked Snape.

Snape nodded his head in agreement and then all of them were off to bed.

Harry went to bed and opened the book. Inside were the words, ***James Potter and Sirius Black proudly present the Marauder's Book, assisted ably by Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew.***

Inside there were pages upon pages in his father's and Sirius handwriting about pranks of all types and all the students and professors they had pranked successfully.

Harry sat long into the night softly caressing the writing of his father and Sirius as they proudly wrote and signed the pranks that had originated from their brain.

The result of their pranks was written at the bottom and was divided into outstanding, good, acceptable and poor depending on how successful they were. Around 80 of their pranks were against the Slytherins and the rest were divided into a general category where they pranked each other and their own House and the other two Houses in Hogwarts.

It was almost dawn before Harry could keep that book away and slowly he settled down to sleep.

Harry woke up at around lunch time to see Snape was frowning no scowling about something.

"Hey," Harry said softly as he went to the bathroom to have a wash. He came out in ten minutes all clean and fresh to find tea, stew and sandwiches all placed under a warming charm. He looked enquiringly at Snape and Snape shook his head. "I have had my meal already Harry. I will have a cup of tea, though." He was still frowning as he poured himself a cup of tea.

Harry silently filled his plate and looked up at Snape who had sat down in front of him.

"A patronus from Albus." Snape told him abruptly.

Harry's face clouded. "What is in it?" he asked as the fireplace turned green and Hermione and a second later McGonagall flood into the cottage.

Both of them were smiling as they came in and Snape' frown and Harry's face made their smiles falter. Hermione rushed to Harry.

"What is it Harry?" she asked him with concern as she looked between Harry and Snape.

Snape answered her and McGonagall as they sat down and helped themselves to the tea. "Albus has sent a Patronus Minerva. He wants Harry to go to Diagon Alley at four in the afternoon for his books. He will be escorted by a few members of the Order and the Weasleys. This will also provide a general outing for Potter from being cramped with me. I am to come along with this merry party as well and bring back Potter to the cottage."

"Hermione will not be able to come." Harry burst out feeling that his birthday was turning sour.

"I have not been called Harry. Hermione and I will come along in disguise and who knows we may pick up something."

Harry did not brighten up. "I don't want an outing Severus. I don't want anything. Let us all stay right here."

"We can't do that Harry. Albus will become suspicious. We should go. There is no arguing on that. You know that, I don't have to tell you

how important it is to keep him in ignorance.” Snape told him sharply, deeply disappointed as Harry, Hermione and McGonagall.

All four of them had planned to go in outrageous disguises and really let their hair down so as to speak and it was terribly disappointing. Snape sent a Patronus answering Dumbledore and smiled reluctantly at Harry. Harry shrugged his shoulders and scowled at Snape.

“I will not go to Grimmauld Place Severus. I will not.”

Snape nodded his head and straightened his shoulders. “Harry this will be your first and the most important test. I will set out your exam for today and we will take it from there. You will peep into both the Weasleys’ minds and see if you can get a hold of their plans. I want you to act sulky and remember if I do insult Black or your father not to feel hurt inside.”

Harry smiled reluctantly at that. He was feeling very down as the day he had been looking forward to, was ruined. He shrugged. It was time for the start and he only hoped he could go through the whole thing successfully.

The mood of happiness was gone as all of them were pretty disgruntled about the coming afternoon. Soon Minerva and Hermione left and Snape cast the de-scenting charms on both of them so that if Remus was there he would not smell McGonagall or Hermione on either of them.

Then Snape and Harry dressed up and Harry armed with his resentment and Snape sneering for all he was worth, checked Harry’s aura and then left for Diagon Alley by floo.

Remus, Tonks, Moody, Dumbledore, Ron, Ginny and Mrs. Weasley were there waiting for them to arrive. The moment Harry stepped out of the floo he was taken into a bone breaking hug from Molly Weasley who then held him at arm’s length and scrutinized him.

Harry had grown a foot taller with all the nutrient potions that Snape had insisted he take with his meals and his happy living in the cottage. His hair was still messy and his eyes brilliantly green. He was still on the thin side, though not scrawny anymore. He smiled at her and she

realized how handsome he had become. He was a beautiful combination of his parents' and he had inherited their best features and she realized once again, their better qualities.

Ron's face was contorted with jealousy before he wiped it off his face. He was taller than Harry but did not seem to carry himself with the same grace as Harry did, though unconsciously. Ginny's eyes gleamed as she thought that her task would be fun and she couldn't wait to start. She grinned at him and he smiled a little at her and then turned to Ron and smiled a little wider at him.

"Hey Ron, how are you? Are you fully healed?" Ron nodded grinning widely, "Yeah Harry I am fully recovered now and so is Ginny." He lowered his voice and asked glancing at Snape who was sneering at Ron and glaring at Harry looking as if he wanted to hex Harry, "How was time with the greasy git Harry? It must have been terrible mate."

Harry's shoulders sagged, a change that everyone noticed and reacted in different ways. Dumbledore and Moody were pleased while Remus was feeling very uncomfortable with that. The reconciliation with the wolf inside him had only just begun and Remus was slowly beginning to heal.

"Harry my boy how have you been?" Dumbledore asked him kindly.

"Fine Sir, and you?" Harry asked him sulkily, looking down at his shoes, "Do I have to go back there Sir?"

Dumbledore smiled, "Yes Harry you must. You realize that what you are attempting to learn with Severus is very important don't you?" and he turned to Snape who was glaring at Harry in a way that promised retribution the moment they got home.

"Severus you have been quite alright? Miss Granger told us Harry had changed the galleon all of them used last year for their Dark Arts and so we were worried. But I let it be as there was nothing from you."

Snape turned to Harry and enquired of him silkily, "Did you Potter?" his black eyes glittering.

Harry shrugged, "Yeah, it was the day you really probed so hard it was extremely painful in your so called Occlumency class. I can change a galleon if I want to can't I?" Harry ended belligerently.

Molly Weasley was promising retribution to one and all afterwards as her stance turned aggressive and she glared furiously at Snape who smirked back at her, exasperating her further.

"Harry, how are you now dear? Was the Occlumency so bad all the time?" asked Mrs. Weasley as she glared at Snape again.

"Not really," he mumbled as he thought of how truthful those words were and grinned to himself. He looked around as though he wanted to draw the attention away from himself and saw Remus standing very stiffly there. Snape would be astounded at the quality of forgiveness in Harry and scold him soundly later on and beam inside with pride, but all that was in the future.

"Hello Remus, how have you been?" Remus smiled a strained smile at Harry. "Fine Harry. It is I who should be asking you that. You have grown taller and all that but how have you been... coping?" the last word came out very quietly as Remus almost swallowed as he spoke.

"Not too well. I feel so guilty most of the time and well, there isn't anything I can do about it now." his voice turned very bitter as he thought of Sirius and how he had been imprisoned in Azkaban for thirteen years and imprisoned again in that blasted house Grimmauld Place for another two.

"It was Sirius's own fault Harry." Remus said heavily making Harry look up sharply in shock at him. Remus nodded his head sadly, "Yes Harry fighting a person like Bellatrix; you have to be more serious and that is not a pun. But he was laughing and playing with a mad woman who makes killing her business."

Harry not knowing how to answer that nodded looking very sad and uncomfortable and Molly not able to see the sadness in him clapped her hands and shooed all of them into Diagon Alley.

Harry received an assortment of gifts from a Chudley Cannons poster from Ron to some home made mince pies from Molly Weasley.

Dumbledore and Remus gave him books on defense and Harry thanked all of them nicely.

Dumbledore had pulled Snape aside and was talking softly to him. Snape had his worst sour face on and Dumbledore seemed very happy. They soon followed the others who had gone ahead chattering and laughing. Well Ron, Ginny and Tonks were very happy, while Harry and Remus were quiet and smiling a little here and there when it was needed.

“Ron,” Harry was about to ask him something as they went to Gringotts for money from their vaults, but forgot in the panic he indulged in when he realized he had not warned the goblins to pretend as if they did not know him, but his fears were unfounded and they went safely down where Harry took a lot of gold from his trust vault.

“Ron,” Harry asked him as they were being measured for their robes, “where is Hermione? She is not with you guys at headquarters?”

Ron’s face fell very comically, “She should be Harry but she has gone off to France once again with her parents’.”

Harry nodded his head trying to peep into Ron’s mind, but it was more difficult that he had thought it would be. They went shopping for almost everything and Harry paused by Eeylops, thinking of Hedwig for a minute; he had asked her to fly to Hogwarts and stay there for the summer when he had left and now he went in and bought a lot of owl treats for her, hoping to pacify her when he went to School.

They walked into every store buying all their stationery, clothes, books and the like. Harry spotted McGonagall and Hermione who had come as mother and daughter and were doing their purchases at the same time as Harry and keeping a discreet eye on everyone. No one except Snape and Harry really knew who they were; their combination of muggle and wizard disguises fooling everyone.

After they finished with their purchases they went into the new shop of the Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes and were greeted by an enthusiastic Fred and George, who dragged Harry to the back and showed him many pranks in various stages of completion.

“How are you?” Fred asked him very seriously, so seriously that Harry was taken aback.

“If the git is doing irritating stuff, then partner of ours all you have to do is send word.”

“We will take care of him completely from head to toe; he will never worry you ever again. Promise.”

Harry was touched. He shook his head, “You have a fabulous place here guys, Snape is fine as irritating as ever but not really harmful. He wouldn’t dare; Dumbledore would kill him.” Then softly, “If you need more money for expansion all you have to do is mpghn...” two hands closed Harry’s mouth not allowing him to finish.

“We are doing fine Harry. Thanks a lot.” George told him grinning as he started showing Harry the various things they had been developing and how it all worked. Soon all three of them were engaged in a discussion of pranks. Harry slightly hinted at a few pranks he had read in his father’s and Sirius’s books and the twins went into rapture as they built correctly on the scant information Harry had given them and they talked excitedly with each other.

“Harry you have the making of a superb prankster.” Fred clapped him on his back making Harry feel a fraud and just a little bit sad that he could not just yet share that book with the Twins openly as it would arouse Dumbledore’s suspicions. Harry, after all was not allowed to have anything of his parents’ stuff other than the invisibility cloak and the photo album that Hagrid had given him in his first year.

Harry accepted a carton full of pranks as his birthday gift from the Twins and walked out to the front of the store to meet the others.

They said their good byes to the Twins and walked back leisurely to The Leaky Cauldron where old Tom was thrilled to see so many people who were actually going to stay and have something instead of just passing by as was the case since Voldemort had made an appearance in the Ministry of Magic a month or so ago.

Now people used The Leaky Cauldron only as a floo point to hurry into Diagon Alley, finish their purchases and hurry back home.

Snape had sent a Patronus to Albus in the morning saying that Harry did not want to go to Grimmauld Place right now and was kicking up an unholy fuss about it and he was tempted to silence the boy forever, and Albus wishing to concede small things had agreed immediately and had arranged for an early dinner after which Harry would leave with Snape.

All of them sat there for a long time having dinner and chatting about inconsequential things. Ron and Harry got into a heated discussion about Quidditch, but if you noticed him carefully you would see the strain around his eyes as he smiled and laughed with Ron.

Ginny kept butting into the conversation and Harry just nodded his head or shook it to answer to any question she put before turning to Ron with another point that had apparently struck him about the Chudley Cannons.

By the time dinner was over Ginny was gritting her teeth and could have hexed Harry and Ron. Ron noticed it and frowned but Harry did not seem to notice Ginny was there in The Leaky Cauldron at all. As that was the way Harry had been behaving all along, only he had been doing it unconsciously then and now he was being deliberate about it no one noticed anything except Molly Weasley.

She saw the way Ginny was trying to get the attention of Harry and the way Harry would answer her queries politely and turn back enthusiastically to Ron and talk Quidditch and smiled a little to herself. She would have been thrilled if her Ginny and Harry whom she thought of her son in everyway would get together, but she instinctively knew that would not happen.

Harry had not even looked at her as a person or a friend, let alone in another way. She sighed as she knew these things had to happen on their own. She looked fondly at Harry and felt a wave of compassion when she realized all that he had gone through.

Sirius had been right last year in wanting Harry to have proper and important information regarding the link and the Prophecy. But everyone except Snape had shot him down, including herself. Now she repented all that yelling and shouting at Sirius for if only Harry had known that You-Know-Who could plant false memories and harm

him through the mind-link Harry had with him, Sirius could have been saved as Harry would have acted more cautiously.

At that time Snape suddenly caught his left forearm causing a flutter and muttering his apologies and he bit out as he left, "Potter you wait at headquarters with Mrs. Weasley and I will take you to the cottage after I come back. Did you understand Potter?" Harry nodded his head not daring to show his concern or cautioning Snape to be careful. Snape looked deep into Harry's eyes nodded once and strode outside and apparated.

McGonagall and Hermione had gone back to the cottage when Harry and the others had entered The Leaky Cauldron. Snape apparated to the cottage and told McGonagall briefly what had happened and asking Hermione to stay in the cottage, he asked McGonagall to go to Grimmauld Place and stay with Harry there. McGonagall only stopped long enough to ask Hermione to be careful and then she left as Snape apparated to Voldemort.

Meanwhile the Dumbledore quickly asked everyone to move to the floo, the moment Snape had left. "Harry, you go first to headquarters and all of us will follow." Harry nodded his head hating the thought of going back to Grimmauld Place but now was not the time to argue.

Harry took the floo and threw a pinch into the fire when there were twenty pops and ten seconds later there was twenty one pops and Harry was gone. Dumbledore could have cursed himself. He should have realized the moment Snape was called Harry should have been sent to Grimmauld Place, instead he had waited for Snape to leave and somehow death eaters had come and taken Harry with them.

Dumbledore roared over the babel of noise everyone was making, "SILENCE. All of you to headquarters right now." he lifted his wand and sent a general message to everyone in the Order and asked them to assemble at Grimmauld Place at once.

In ten minutes everyone was at Grimmauld Place. Molly Weasley was crying helplessly and McGonagall was terrified even though Snape was there. It could mean that both of them were in danger. Remus was horrified; first it was Sirius and now Harry. He had not even

explained to Harry about being so distant with him and now Harry was in the clutches of Voldemort.

Voldemort had had a lousy two months. He was almost coming to the conclusion he was going to lose even with his horcruxes. The fight at the Department of Mysteries was a total failure and now he was never going to get any respect or fear until the bloody Boy-who-Lived became the bloody Boy-who-Died.

It was at time a lowly death eater who worked in the Ministry of Magic came with news that Potter would be roaming the Alley on his birthday that was three days away. Voldemort had asked Malfoy, Snape, Rookwood, McNair and a few others who were in public offices of one kind or the other to stay away. Snape had asked permission to leave for the Isle of Mann to rest in solitude and Voldemort had given it telling him to report if Dumbledore ever called him for meetings.

“Come to me after the meetings and any chores he gives you Severus and inform me. Other wise you are free to go. Make sure your hands are clean. Be careful, I do not want to rescue you from prison as well.” He had said glaring at Malfoy all the time.

That summer had seen the marking of Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, Parkinson, Millicent Bulstrode, Daphne Greengrass, Theodore Nott and Terry Boot who was the lone Ravenclaw.

When the death eater from the Ministry had bought the news Voldemort had taken a day off on muggle baiting and chewed on this. The next day he had called Bellatrix, Avery and Mulciber and spoke to them and then dismissed them.

And then Voldemort had waited.

This time he would be careful and he would not make the mistake of giving Potter’s wand back to him. The end would come swiftly and without much yelling and screaming and frustration.

The waiting came to an end on the night of the 31st of July.

End of Chapter – 11

Chapter – 12

Harry had been planning to floo straight to Grimmauld Place when he was grabbed by two persons and then he was apparated for the first time in his life. When they landed he was stunned on the spot. When he was enervated a few minutes later and got his bearings right, he realized his wand had been taken away from him, he was bound and silenced and was standing in front of Voldemort. Strangely his scar did not hurt at all and he looked around but could not see anyone's face as all of them were wearing masks.

Harry was very frightened as he stood there, not realizing that one more person was sweating more than him. For Snape was reliving the past and this time he vowed to himself that he would die with Harry rather than live alone once again. Once Harry was gone there would be nothing for him, no family, and no more affection shown to him, nothing.

Snape berated and cursed himself for not taking Harry to the cottage the moment his mark started burning. Harry had the portkey he had given to take Harry away to the cottage in case there was an emergency, but here they could not be used as this place was warded against it. Snape was desperate and he stood there and breathed slowly in and out, regulating his thoughts and slowing them down as well.

In a minute Snape had completely occluded his mind against any emotion and started tackling the problem as a logical puzzle. How to stop Voldemort for the time being and get Harry out of here was what he was thinking without much success though.

“Well my faithful followers, all of us are gathered here to witness an event that will make me the supreme ruler of the Wizarding World. Here before all of you, stands Harry Potter who will die at my hands today. Today I shall begin to rule.” Voldemort smiled at everyone with his red eyes glittering with an eerie happiness.

All the death eaters raised their hands as one and sparks of all colors were seen above to form a colorful spectacle that was truly magnificent.

He raised his wand and smiled at Harry. "It was **not** very nice knowing you Harry Potter. Now I am going to kill you. Goodbye."

Harry tried to speak, but found he could not open his mouth and suddenly Voldemort was there in front of him and had taken aim at point blank range. Harry tried his best to release the power that had crushed Snape's bones but he could not do a thing. Voldemort had suppressed his magic and Harry knowing the difference now, found that access to his magic was almost non-existent and very sluggish.

At that time a voice spoke with all humility, just when Snape had begun to raise his wand to kill Voldemort from behind, the moment he would kill Harry. He put down his wand sharply. He knew he would not be noticed as he had placed a notice-me-not charm and an invisibility charm on his wand arm.

He did not know how to save Harry so he was going to do the next best thing. He was going to kill Voldemort and then be killed by the other death eaters and give the Wizarding World the time to prepare yet again to face this monster.

"My Lord," said a voice humbly.

"Arran." The impatient voice came out in a hiss. "This had better be good." Voldemort was not pleased and it showed in the way he glared at the boy or man whoever it was who had spoken.

"It is Master." Arran bowed deeply. "Master you have a link with this wretched boy; have been connected My Lord, to him for the last fifteen years. Now Master you are at the last step and we must make sure that the magical link does not in any way come back to harm us later, because there is the Prophecy... Master we must stop the link that ties you O mighty Slytherin with the shameful creature and sever all connections to him before you can kill him. I am sure Severus will assist you as I would be privileged to."

Voldemort paused in his angry retort and considered the death eaters words, whose voice sounded so familiar to Harry, but for the life of him could not recognize him. "What are you trying to say Arran?" Voldemort asked him his eyes boring into the other's face.

Severus stepped forward, "Master if I may." Harry's heart jumped into his mouth as he recognized that voice and almost choked as he realized what Severus must be going through at this moment. He would have gone back sixteen years and he must have relived Regulus Black's death.

Only Harry would be killed clean. Harry shuddered as he thought of being at death's door without avenging his parents' and Sirius. He had failed, that was that, Harry thought forlornly.

He had been struggling continuously but the binds were placed by Voldemort and they were proving impossible to break.

"What Arran says has a lot of merit, Master. What if this blasted ignominy dies and we face some complication that may be caused because of the link. We could look through the library and see if there are any potions or spells to close the link, apart from Occlumency."

Voldemort slowly nodded his head. "Do it. Place him in the dungeons until then. I don't want anyone to play with him, Severus," the last word sounded like a whip shot as Voldemort caught Snape fingering his wand and looking towards Harry.

"I beg your pardon Master, please forgive me. May I be excused to leave for the library?" Voldemort smiled at Snape's enthusiasm and nodded his head.

"First take him to the dungeons Severus. Then you may go to the library."

"I will go with him Master, if I may." Arran stood there bowing deeply as Voldemort smiled.

"It is truly heartening to see youngsters so enthusiastic. Yes, you may accompany him Arran and do your research quickly. Keep Potter's magic subdued and keep him bound." Voldemort dismissed them and

turned to the other death eaters who were present and started talking to them in soft tones. It was then he noticed Pettigrew was not there and his red eyes narrowed.

"Where is Pettigrew?" he demanded.

"Maybe rat went away so that he wouldn't witness the cruel death of his best friend's son and better friend's Godson, My Lord." Arran's voice was mocking in the extreme and Voldemort smiled, his lipless mouth widening horribly and his eyes glittering in amusement.

"You are getting better by the day Arran. You have imbibed the principles of your mother very well even though she was not with you during your formative years. Well off with you and do not remove the silencing spell from Mr. Potter. His speech tends to be aggravating." Voldemort smirked at Harry who glared at him, pouring into his eyes and expression the hate he was denied to express.

Arran simply bowed and Harry was wondering who this was who enjoyed such popularity and closeness with Voldemort and dared talk with him so familiarly and why did his voice haunt him so.

Before he could ponder anymore Snape had come behind Harry and pushed him roughly, "Move it Potter, we have work to do and we are not as free as you are now." and led Harry away amidst laughter from the death eaters.

They went down swiftly to the dungeons in a single file and Harry stumbled along. Arran the death eater was in front of him, his face still covered by the mask and Snape walked behind him, holding on to Harry as he stumbled and held his hands that were tied behind him squeezing them every other second trying to comfort him with his touch.

After about ten minutes, that told Harry how big this place was, they reached the dungeons, where Arran opened a cell and gestured Harry inside. Snape followed him and turned to Arran and spoke smoothly.

"Arran, now you may leave. I will attend to our one and only Potter and follow you to the library."

“Why Sevvie, want to free him do we?” Arran asked him mockingly. Snape froze in horror and shock as he stared at the death eater. Then he came to his senses.

“What did you say?” Snape hissed angrily, “I could kill you for that remark.” Snape hissed in rage as he scowled dangerously and lifted his wand.

“Ah! But Severus my love, you are a great actor and you should receive an Oscar, do you know what that is? That is a muggle award given to the best actor.” Arran was still mocking as he stood at the door of the cell.

Snape raised his wand, and Arran spoke making Snape so scared and furious at the same time, “Then if you are really a death eater loyal to our Lord and Master, then why Sevvie-Bevvie did you lift your wand against our Lord to kill him before or as he was about to kill our esteemed house guest?”

Snape almost dropped his wand in shock. Arran could see auras? And he had seen Severus lift his wand to kill Voldemort? Well there was only one thing he could do. He steadied his arm and said suddenly, “*Avada Keda*.” When his wand left his hand and went to Arran.

Snape went to stand in front of Harry and tried to get his second wand out, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you Sevvie. This time I could retaliate with a curse of my own, one that could make you bare your heart to old Snake-face up there.” Arran looked through his mask at Snape the smile in his voice very much apparent.

Harry was astounded. Snape had planned to kill Voldemort. His brain almost shut down at the way Snape was inviting his death and all for his sake? Harry started trembling with the realization that Snape had not only lifted his arm to kill Voldemort, but also this death eater. Snape was willing to kill for him and then prepared to die a horrible death as Harry knew what the other death eaters would do to him before they finally killed him.

Snape froze at the death eaters words as did Harry whose rather conflicting thoughts were stopped by the words ‘Snake-face’. There

was a pin drop silence for almost two minutes and then Snape, removed his mask and looked at Arran. "What did you say?" he whispered hope thundering in his heart at the words 'Snake-face' that had evoked in his breast.

"Old Snake-face Sevvie, old Snake-face," the death eater who did not remove his mask said mockingly and then for the first time spoke seriously. "What will I be promised if I were to help you to free your dear Mr. Potter, professor Snape?"

"Anything." was the spontaneous answer.

"Will you swear to be my slave for the next five years?" Arran's so familiar voice was harshly mocking as Harry blanched at the question.

Slave for the next five years? Snape would be as good as dead by then, Harry thought in horror as he struggled afresh to at least throw off the silencing charm so that he could beg Snape not to accept anything like this.

Snape did not even blink. "Yes, he nodded his head, "I will take an oath right now but after you give me an oath that you will not harm Potter and help him escape from here."

Harry shook his head as Snape glanced at him. Snape turned away and looked at the death eater who was watching this by-play between Snape and Harry.

"Well then it is rather fortunate that I really do not want a slave Snape. Besides you would make a very ugly one Sevvie." Arran laughed as he saw the sudden rage on Snape's face.

"Arran!" Snape hissed furiously feeling very frightened to even contemplate the fact the young death eater might be playing with them and then hand them over to Voldemort. If that happened, he knew he and Harry would be made to long for death before they actually did die, "I will kill you, if you are playing with me Arran," Snape was so scared, his magic was beginning to react and he was shaking as the magic inside him started spiraling out of control.

"Shut up Snape and bloody hell man, calm down." Arran suddenly hissed and then straightened up to only lean on the dungeon door casually before once again speaking mockingly, "Well, well Mr. Potter my goodness me, those are the binds that were placed by our Lord and Master, they will not come off so easily. Severus and I will stay here for five minutes just to watch the fun, I think."

"Arran, you are cruel," Voldemort came along with Bellatrix Lestrange and Lucius Malfoy just then, both of them smirking at the way Harry was struggling with his binds. Arran bowed low as did Snape.

Snape quickly replaced his death eaters mask to cover his face and the gamut of expressions he simply could not control and waited silently, feeling so helpless and worthless as he stood there so near Harry but unable to help the boy who had come to mean so much to him in so short a time.

"Well yes Master, one has to be sometimes to get the best out of slaves. Look at him," Arran said laughter lacing his voice, "he struggles and struggles. It is as quaint to watch as it would be with the muggles. I will stun him and leave him here so that he will not struggle away to his death before his time." Voldemort actually laughed at that as did Bellatrix and Malfoy before turning back.

"Don't take too long Arran." Bellatrix warned him, her black eyes glittering insanely as they left, going the way they came.

Arran waited for two minutes looking at the passage from where Voldemort had come and then swiftly took out a stunned rat with a silver paw from his robes. He walked to Harry who was standing in shock and disbelief and thankfulness that the death eater had not betrayed Snape and flinched as he came closer.

Snape went to stand protectively and Arran put his wand into his pocket looking at Snape, placed his finger over his lips to ask for silence and took out a small pair of scissors. He came closer to Harry, cut a small lock of his hair and passing the rat to Snape, took another vial from his robes, opened it and put the hair into it and swirled it.

Snape was astounded as he gaped at Wormtail who was lying stunned in his hands and at Arran who was working very swiftly. He

took the rat from Snape and threw it to the floor, first casting a freezing charm on it, enervated it. Then he cast the spell to change him into a human and Harry watched with fascination as the rat turned into Pettigrew.

Wormtail lay helplessly on the floor frozen and unable to understand anything and totally bewildered. Arran levitated the rat and gestured to Snape who was now looking very alert, and grabbed him.

Arran then removed the freezing charm and poured the vial into Pettigrew and immediately flicked his wand and chanted softly for almost a minute. Snape's eyes widened as he understood the spell Arran was casting. It was Black magic and non-removable and Wormtail would be in this form from now on.

Harry heard his name and frowned but as Snape had not said a word he did not say anything either. Arran had made Wormtail remember the fact he was Harry Potter but nothing else and the oblivate he would cast in a few minutes would compliment this spell and it would be virtually unbreakable.

In another minute, the rat changed in front of his eyes into Harry James Potter. "Snape wait outside, at the end of the passage to my right." Arran said softly all the mocking and laughter gone from his voice and very serious now. "Go, I will not do any harm to Mr. Potter, not after I have gone this far to ensure his escape safely. I am going to oblivate the rat, and I really do not want you to be here after that."

Snape looked at the death eater for a long moment and then hugged Harry, slipping his second wand into his robes, something Arran did not miss and grinned to him self, but did not do anything about it and watched as Snape left quickly and walked swiftly to the end of passage to wait there as per the instructions of the death eater.

The death eater came to Harry who was no longer scared but thoughtful about what would now be demanded of him and Snape as the death eater had gone to great pains to rescue him and keep Snape's loyalties hidden for the time being. Arran took out the wand that Snape had placed in Harry's robes and held Harry tightly against him with Snape's wand in his left hand and pushing against Harry's throat.

“Oblivate!” Arran’s voice rang out clearly, but softly and Pettigrew would forget everything except what Arran had chanted before. Then Arran pointed his wand at Harry and chanted softly in a language that Harry did not recognize and then suddenly he felt woozy and staggered and would have fallen if Arran had not been holding him.

Once the binds had gone, Harry’s magic surged and he had felt very light headed and held on tightly to the death eater.

“I have transferred the binds from you to him. I dare not remove the spells as Voldemort may have a monitoring charm on them. This way we are safe. The rat knows these spells too, Voldemort, yes Potter I can say his name too, will think the rat placed the Black Magic on him self and transferred the spells to him after instructing you to oblivate him before you escape, so I will not be caught and nor will Snape.

“You will be fine as soon as your magic settles and will also be able to speak as well, but take it easy as you will need some time for the magic to settle. Come, we have to move fast now and we should not be seen here any longer.” Arran carefully took Peter’s wand and gave it to Harry.

Harry walked unsteadily beside him, a huge amount of reluctant respect creeping into his mind for this death eater who had had the gall to play up Voldemort like this and so cleverly too.

He wondered what Arran would ask of Snape and him for helping them like this. Snape came running as he saw Harry walking unsteadily, “Before you assume I have cursed him or anything, I have transferred his binds to the rat. So he is feeling very light headed at present that is all.”

Snape did not answer him, but took both the wands Arran had handed over to him and checked Harry thoroughly. He turned to the death eater who shook his head in amusement at the check, “Not now Severus, later, we will discuss later. Now I want Potter to be taken to a safe place that the Order does not know about. Is there a place like that?’

At Snape’s silent nod, Arran continued now talking swiftly, “me and a few others wish to talk to him. You will remain right here until

Pettigrew is found out and then when all of us have been dismissed you will take us to meet Mr. Potter. Till we speak with Mr. Potter I want him isolated. You have my assurance that neither Mr. Potter nor you will be harmed. The events of the last fifteen minutes should be proof enough.” The death eater looked at Snape who nodded at once.

“Good. Then I will meet with you later Mr. Potter. Now come along, we have to go. Severus and I will go back to the library and you will be escorted to your freedom and please remember Mr. Potter, you are not to make any contact with the Order or with the outer world until I meet with you. I hope I am clear on that?” Harry nodded silently. He was still feeling a bit woozy.

Suddenly another figure came out of the shadows, Snape was about to fire when Arran stopped him, “She is one of my people Severus, the ones who will not harm you.” He said softly. Arran moved to her and spoke softly to her and she came back with her, “Now you have a portkey or can you apparate?”

“Portkey.” Snape told him tersely.

“Good. Ria, yes this is Rhiannon Severus and she will take over from here. Mr. Potter when she says you may activate your portkey please do so at once and remember no outside contact.”

Harry nodded silently and then hugged Snape who hugged him back and whispered, “Take care and good luck,” to him before he clumsily followed the other death eater who had also a mask on her face. She turned after a minute and silently took his arm and walked faster without saying a word.

After fifteen minutes of walking through the dungeons, Rhiannon led him into the dark night and told him to activate his portkey.

“Thank you,” Harry told her and felt her start in surprise, but she did not say anything and Harry activated the portkey and fell into the living room of the cottage where McGonagall and Hermione were waiting with trepidation and the moment they saw him, they simply fell on him and crushed him.

Harry told them what had happened and McGonagall and Hermione were suitably horrified and impressed both by Snape's actions and the casual confidence and sheer nerve of the death eater. Harry warned McGonagall not to say a word and descend herself every time she went to Grimmauld Place and still later after another telling Harry took the healing potions that Hermione poured down his throat went to sleep worrying about Snape and thinking of the death eater called Arran with reluctant admiration.

Snape and Arran walked back to the library, looking on the sleeping Harry Potter a.k.a. Peter Pettigrew. Arran grinned to himself as he saw the rat. This would be a fitting punishment for all his crimes. Now if only they could punish a few others it would make his day. He was under the assumption that Snape was one of them like the rat and initially he had wanted to hang Snape along with Peter when he had heard the news that Potter would be captured on his birthday.

But seeing Snape's arm rise up, he could see auras, a fact like so many other facts he had made sure no one knew, he had changed his mind and had baited him. Snape had almost cast the killing curse for Potter and had been willing to become a slave to release the boy. That had decided the issue for Arran and he had taken care of only Peter leaving Snape alone.

They reached the library and soon were burrowed in huge old tomes that had no information whatsoever. They worked all through the night and well into the day without saying a word to each other. By evening Voldemort came in with the entire inner circle death eaters. He was scowling and looked absolutely furious.

"Arran, Severus! Have you seen the rat anywhere here? He is missing since yesterday."

"You mean since Potter was brought in Master?" Arran asked him innocently.

Voldemort's eyes narrowed and his face showed a sudden tension. He turned and left striding away taking the route to the dungeons calling over his shoulder to Arran and Snape to follow him. The death

eaters all of them almost ran after him, anxious as an angry Voldemort was not a good omen for them.

All of them went into the dungeons and into the cell where 'Harry Potter' was staying. He was sleeping soundly unaware of the changes in him. Voldemort flicked his wand and enervated him. He woke up all disoriented and then cowered as he saw Voldemort standing there.

"Harry Potter?" he asked softly.

"Yes and who are you? I am so scared and I really don't know why." The rat said very confused. Voldemort's face darkened. He cast four spells rapidly one after another and found traces of obliviate, Black magic and polyjuice.

"Where is Harry Potter Wormtail?" asked Voldemort oozing rage from every pore of his body.

"I am Harry Potter and who are you and why am I Harry Potter and what is a Wormtail?" he asked as Voldemort simply quivered in rage and Arran quivered with suppressed laughter. Snape nudged him, scowling at him and Arran kept quiet with great effort.

"Wormtail, I will kill you. Tell me at once how you helped the blasted boy escape."

"Who is Wormtail and who is the blasted boy and why should I help whom to escape from where and who are you?"

Arran just could not help it. He cast a silencing charm around him and simply shook with laughter. This was a pensieve moment, driving the dementors' away forever moment and he was having fun.

"Crucio!" Voldemort's voice rang out in anger and a second later Wormtail's cries were almost bringing the dungeon roof down. Voldemort finally took off the curse and then asked him the same thing.

"How did Harry Potter escape?"

“I am Harry PPPotttter and I wantt to escape from you. Who are you and why are you hurting me?”

Snape bravely stepped forward. “Master I think we should let him be for sometime and give him the ‘*clear solution*’ and then ask him.” He said softly bowing low.

Voldemort whirled around and was about to curse him, when what Snape had said struck him. “Brew it fresh. Help him Arran and Rhiannon. We shall give it to the fool and see if he remembers.” And cursing the rat once more, Voldemort left furious that the Harry Potter had escaped once again.

How did the boy escape? Was it Wormtail or one of the others? His mind turned to Snape, but dismissed it as he had been in the library all day long with Arran and the boy was almost his right hand. Well he would find out and whoever it was would beg for death by the time he finished.

Serves him right thought Arran and Snape was thinking exactly the same thing, as they went into the potions lab and prepared the *clear solution* that was actually a Black magic potion in spite of its innocuous name and Rhiannon, Snape and Arran wasted no time. They prepared the potion and took it to Voldemort.

Nagini was there and she sniffed both of them and hissed softly to her Master. Snape and Arran’s eyes met for a second in perfect understanding as they looked away almost at once and both their eyes went simultaneously to the huge snake.

Apparently Voldemort was not taking chances and was verifying their identity through his familiar. Voldemort asked them to follow him and the others and all of them went into the dungeons and Wormtail was there hungry and scared and as soon as he saw Voldemort he whimpered and cried out aloud.

Voldemort sniffed the potion and asked Snape to give it to him. Snape poured the potion down Wormtail’s throat and he passed out. Voldemort’s eyes glittered dangerously as it came to rest on Snape,

Arran and Rhiannon. "What has happened to him? Drink it Severus." He ordered.

Snape did not even blink a fact Voldemort noticed and frowned as that meant the potion was correct. Snape drowned it and swayed but otherwise he was all right, as he had never been obliterated in his life and the potion did him no harm and did not reveal anything.

Voldemort scowled and turned to the rat and enervated him. Wormtail looked at him and shuddered. "Who am I? That is what you want to know don't you? I am Harry Potter and I am so confused."

"Why is it not working?" he hissed at them but Snape as well as Arran kept quiet as the answer would mean a killing curse from the enraged Dark Lord.

"Well?" he shouted as all of them flinched and looked down and Wormtail whimpered once again.

None of them unfortunately had any answers. Voldemort paced up and down in the dungeon room kicking out at Wormtail whenever he passed him by and then he stood still and smiled nastily at everyone. "I want answers and correct ones. Until then none of you will leave here. Bella," he called and as she came, Voldemort pulled up her sleeve and pressed the dark mark that would call the rest.

"All of you may leave the dungeons, but remember none of you will leave until I have my answers. **Now go.**" The last came as a shout and all of them scuttled away to safety.

Snape led Arran straight to the potion section and within a few minutes took out a book that dealt with potions for snakes who are magical familiars. He showed a few potions to Arran and Arran looked through them and nodded once. Snape then went to the Black magic section and started browsing as did Arran but he browsed for Voldemort and soon they had an assortment of books.

Snape took out some parchments and copied the potions that were required for familiars and banished the book back to its place. He then started with the Black magic books and started writing down spells and their effects.

Arran and Rhiannon started searching for spells that could correct Wormtail and they wrote a great many spells. The other death eaters too, had gathered in the huge library in small groups and were feverishly looking at various spells, potions and charms, mostly dark and Black magic oriented.

Then as if pre arranged all of them left for the many potions labs that were situated in the dungeons. All of them had parchments and Snape, Arran and Rhiannon formed a group and everyone left them strictly alone as they were the people who had initial charge of Harry Potter. Everyone stayed away from them.

Arran summoned eight cauldrons and soon had various potions bubbling away in them. Three of them were for Nagini and that was under the sole supervision of Snape who was working at a very dark corner. Arran had arranged the other five cauldrons in such a manner that no one would be able to reach the last three. Snape finished one potion, conjured a vial and bottled it and slipped it into his robes and Rhiannon immediately took over by starting a new potion that was for Voldemort.

Four hours later Snape had finished with all the potions he needed and the trio relaxed. They worked silently and efficiently and were the first to finish the potions.

Snape taking no chances this time, glared a little at Arran and started a loud argument with Arran about the last potion they were completing for the Dark Lord. Rhiannon was watching them and she nodded at both of them and entered into their discussion about a potion that had not come quite right and suggested they go back to the library for some more research. They were pretty loud and made sure everyone knew about their doubts of that particular potion.

Almost everyone heard their discussion and in fact Bellatrix suggested a book for finding the correct potion that drew the worst glare from Snape, "I know." Was all he said as he strode away quickly? Arran rolled his eyes and smiled at Bellatrix who returned his smile as she turned away to answer her husband who was asking her for something.

They went out still arguing and once outside Snape fell silent as did Arran. They walked briskly to the library and there Snape conjured a big rat and as Arran opened its mouth, Snape poured the contents of the three vials into the rat. Then Snape stunned it and gave it to Arran who held it away from his body. Snape enervated it and pointing the wand at the rat and started chanting in the same language that Arran had before. It was the ancient language of their land and Snape was one of the few wizards who knew it. So did Arran, apparently.

The chant was long and it took more than three minutes for Snape to finish and Rhiannon was watching their back to make sure they would be uninterrupted.

Snape finished at last and the rat glowed blue before it turned normal. Snape carefully let it down and it ran away towards the door. It would have gone out in a minute, but Nagini and along with her, Voldemort came striding in. The others walked towards the door nonchalantly, when Nagini smelt the rat and opening her mouth, swallowed it not realizing the rat had stopped docilely for the snake to devour it.

“Well, have you three done anything at all? No one seems to have any clue whatsoever.” Voldemort asked sourly, his eyes flashing in rage.

Not showing their jubilation at seeing the rat being swallowed whole, Snape answered for all of them, “we have Master. In one potion the *resceptacula*, we ran into a slight problem and came here to check. We have seven other potions right here.”

Voldemort was slightly mollified and with a, “Come we shall test the seven now you can do the one later,” walked down to the dungeons straight away with the other three following him and opened the door. Wormtail was lying trembling and crying softly. He saw Voldemort and started crying loudly, “I am Harry Pppotter. I am Harry Potter. I don’t know Wormtail. Please don’t hurt me.”

Voldemort simply ignored his blathering. “Open your mouth, else I will curse you.” That was all the incentive Wormtail needed and he opened his mouth at once. Voldemort nodded to Snape and Snape went to Wormtail and poured each potion down his throat after Voldemort sniffed them of course.

Wormtail had the last potion and then fell into a stupor. Voldemort could have pulled all the non-existent hair on his head as he looked at Wormtail in frustration. It was now apparent that Wormtail had betrayed him, conveniently forgetting the fact that Wormtail betrayed the Potters to him first; and the miserable rat had released Harry Potter canceling his debt to the boy.

“Avada Kedavra.” The power that came from the curse caused Wormtail to hit the wall and fall down dead even as he was in a stupor. This was the curse he should have cast at the Boy-who-Lived; instead he was now reduced to casting it on his servant. If he was human he would have cried. As Voldemort he kicked the already broken body and left the place saying to Snape, “dispose of that and all of you get out.” And went up in sheer frustration to his beloved familiar to try and calm him self.

Snape transfigured the body into a matchstick and burnt it and banished the ashes away. He walked with Arran and Rhiannon a little deeper into the massive dungeons and asked him quietly, “When will you come? Come quickly as I have to take Potter to the Order headquarters.”

“I will come with you right now.” He lifted his left hand and spoke into his ring that he was wearing on his middle finger.

“Come Ria, I will meet you outside The Leaky Cauldron in the small alley in muggle London, the first alley to the right.” Arran said and walked away with Rhiannon.

Snape went up and stood before his Master and asked for orders. “Find out how the boy escaped Severus and tell me. Go now.”

Snape bowed and left. He walked to the apparition wards and apparated straight to the alley Arran had mentioned. He waited for half an hour before there were a few pops all around him and some five persons in dark robes surrounded him. Arran stepped forward. “Take us to him.” He said quietly.

Snape conjured a long rope and made it into a portkey and a second later six people vanished from there. They reappeared once again many hundreds of miles away in the middle of a wilderness.

Snape keyed in all of them and walked inside the wards totally exhausted and showing it for the first time. Harry opened the door and ran out and hugged Snape tightly not minding the others, "Severus how are you? Are you all right? Merlin I have been so worried." Two other figures also came running out of the cottage and stopped abruptly by the doorway as they saw others with Snape, causing Arran to scowl in anger as he saw Potter had been in touch with two others.

That was when Harry saw the death eater for the first time and he stopped in shock.

"Sirius?"

End of Chapter – 12

Chapter – 13

Harry felt his head spin at the young man standing in front of him and he clung to Snape whose eyes widened in understanding and almost dragged Harry inside. Harry was walking no stumbling as he dragged along behind Snape with his eyes firmly fixed on the death eater who was looking slightly puzzled at Harry's reaction to him.

He was just like Sirius; with his hair falling just like Sirius's had, his eyes the same color as Sirius, his body was just like Sirius, he walked the same way, he looked the same way and Merlin! He even lifted his eyebrows in the same way. This was Sirius; Harry was almost convinced and he had come out of the veil looking some twenty years younger and he had become a death eater and had saved Harry and had killed the rat.

Poor Harry! His conflicting thoughts went round and round in his head until he felt dizzy with their intensity. Why had Sirius not contacted him? But Sirius was dead wasn't he? Harry had seen him fall into the veil. Then did Voldemort rescue him from the veil somehow and was he going to use him to harm Harry?

Was that why he had saved Harry? Because he was Sirius? But if he had saved Harry because Harry was his godson, then why did he not call on Harry to let him know he was alive? Did he not realize how Harry would be feeling?

Harry's thoughts almost destroyed his mind at that moment as his world spun around him. Harry was shaking with so many emotions and he simply could not take his eyes off the death eater and Harry's face had an expression that was a combination of hope and apology and despair and agony and betrayal, betrayal that Sirius had not come for him and then confusion that this simply could not be *his* Sirius as *his* Sirius would have come to him first.

All of them had by now trooped tiredly inside and Hermione and McGonagall had seen the death eater and had gasped, putting their hands over their mouths in total surprise and shock. It was very cramped in the cottage and Snape shrank the sofas and all of them

sat on the floor on which McGonagall hurriedly conjured a thick carpet.

No sooner had they sat down than Harry whispered at the death eater "*Who are you? Just who are you?*" Harry was trembling with shock as he kept looking at the death eater who was he knew by the name of Arran and who was looking right back at him in astonishment and a small frown at Harry's behavior as Harry turned in sudden anger. Snape had known damn him. "**Severus!**" Harry almost ruined his throat in his desperation to understand, "What is going on here? Who in the name of Merlin is *that?*" Harry's magic started going haywire and the whole cottage started shaking along with Harry.

"Harry just calm down, I said calm DOWN." Snape put his hand on Harry's chin and turned it to him. Harry's eyes were wide in his face and he was shaking with the intensity of his feeling. There were four other people with Arran and Harry had not even seen them.

"He is Arran Lestrangle, Harry, the son of Bellatrix. This is his cousin Rhiannon, the daughter of Rabastan Lestrangle. He is twenty years old and she is your age."

Harry stared at the death eater who now understood Harry's stares and smiled at him. Harry though did not smile back at him as he kept looking. He could have been Sirius all over again. He looked just like Sirius did before Azkaban, the way he had been in Harry's parents' wedding photographs. *Arran Lestrangle! He was Arran Lestrangle! Not Sirius Black.* Harry calmed down slowly and still shaking realized with clarity for the first time since he set his eyes at the death eater that this man was not Sirius.

The first feeling after that realization was total and utter disappointment. A feeling of despondency ripped through Harry as he realized that this man was not Sirius. For five sweet minutes he had hoped against hope and now that hope was crushed. Harry swallowed hard as he tried to look as if he did not mind and had made a mistake and failed miserably as he just could not take his eyes of that young man.

It took a few minutes for Harry to get his bearings and when he did he blushed in sheer embarrassment at the way he had behaved as he slowly came to his senses.

Arran had the same features, the same eyes, the same everything and Harry found his eyes straying to him again. That was why his voice had been so familiar. It was like hearing Sirius. As he knew Sirius had gone his brain had refused to accept or recognize the voice. He saw Arran looking at him and he reddened and turned away looking at the others but not really registering them, who had gathered there and blushed once more as he realized he had acted such a fool in front of so many.

This man was the son of Sirius's killer. Harry grimaced at the irony of it. He just wanted to keep looking at the young man on one hand because he was so much like Sirius, like his twin in fact and yet on the other he was a man whom Harry should just hate on principle because it was his mother who killed Sirius. It was all very confusing to Harry as he sneaked yet another look at the face he had thought he would never see again.

Arran cleared his throat in the silence of the cramped cottage. "We have come here to talk to you in detail about many things. Now you know Draco, Pansy and Blaise. This is Ria my cousin and both of us are home schooled. All of us are against Voldemort," at Harry's widening of his eyes, Arran smiled, "Yes as I told you before I can say his name as can all of them here and all of us want to help you provided you will help us in return."

Harry looked helplessly at Snape, McGonagall and Hermione who were all silently watching the young and handsome Sirius look a like death eater talk so casually of opposing Voldemort. Harry on his part tried to come to terms that this was a death eater and he was here to talk business and demand something from them for helping them. Only his brain refused to work beyond the fact he was looking just like Sirius.

He grimaced inside and scolded himself silently. "Harry you are being as silly as you were in third year when you did not learn the Patronus charm because you wanted to hear your mother's and father's voices.

Just like them, Sirius is also,” Harry gulped and shaking he clasped his trembling hands, “also...also dead. This is **not** Sirius okay?” He swallowed again and pushing all his wayward emotions and thoughts compressing them inside gazing sightlessly at his hands.

A minute or two later Harry steadied him self and looked up at the others who had accompanied Arran LeStrange. Draco Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson, Blaize Zabini and the other girl must be the one who led him out of the dungeons and to safety, what was her name yes, Rhiannon.

All of them who had until now been known as hard core Slytherins, who would be worse than their parents, who were already death eaters, who were cruel to everyone in School and hated by one and all. Yet all of them were here ready to fight and kill their parents’ and oppose Voldemort.

Harry swept his gaze once over everyone and looked for a moment at Draco, who was steadily gazing at him no animosity in his grey eyes, but a slight flush that might have been embarrassment or shame or something else that Harry could not discern, filled his cheeks. Harry looked away and turned to Arran who was the spokesperson and leader for their group. He was also the eldest and all the others were Harry’s age.

“What do you want of me?” he asked Arran in a very low troubled voice, “And how will I be sure all these,” Harry looked for a second at the Slytherins who were sitting there quietly, “people with you are against Voldemort?”

“Because they will give their oath to that effect and they will also not seek revenge in case their parents’ are killed or killed by your side.” Arran paused for a second for that to sink in and then continued,

“That means all of us are here without out parents’ knowledge and that alone should convince you Potter but we will give you a general oath to the effect we are against Voldemort and we will do our best to help you to bring him and the real death eaters down. In return all of us want to be protected from prosecution and our assets, properties and vaults are released to us and we be allowed to live our lives in peace.”

Harry was awake by this time as he listened to Arran who was speaking as if **he was** the Ministry. He looked at him with disbelieving eyes.

“And you think I will have this type of influence with the Ministry of magic? The Ministry of Magic called me an attention seeking idiot last year and the people believed them. You want to fight against Voldemort, great, but you want a guarantee *from me* that you will be free; well I cannot give you that. You should approach Dumbledore. He is the man with all the influence.” Harry’s voice was incredulous.

Arran shrugged equally angrily, “And you are the Boy-who-Lived,” as Harry opened his mouth to retort fiercely Arran held his hands up, “the people listen to you Potter. You are their hope and when you defeat Voldemort they are going to kiss the hem of your robes a.k.a. death eater style. Use a little bit of that influence to help us. We are not asking much while we are going to fight for you like I did today. You owe me a life debt for that. I could call you in on that you know.”

Arran was very disappointed in Harry and it showed in his bitter speech. Draco and the others were mistaken about his bravery, and his escape in the Department of Mysteries must have been a fluke. Arran sighed in sheer frustration. Potter had to help them, they were the children of the worst of the death eaters and the Ministry would never give them a chance.

And all the drama just because Potter thought that he, Arran looked exactly like his godfather. Well Potter was weak and he was their Savior. What a joke!

He sighed as he thought of the fate of the Wizarding World that was dependent on this boy, and sighed again but it could not be helped as he and the others in this room with him needed Potter weak or not. He squared his shoulders and was about to call in the life debt to make Potter help all of them, only his respect for the boy went zooming down when suddenly Potter turned to whisper to Snape after erecting a silencing charm around them.

Arran watched as Snape shook his head angrily as did McGonagall and Granger and Potter was obviously not agreeing with all three of them. After five minutes of tense fighting between Potter on one hand

and the other three, Snape angrily shrugged off Potter's beseeching hands on his arms and flicked his wand and a beautiful pensieve came into his hands.

Potter was looking miserable as Snape turned away angrily, but canceling the silencing charm Potter squared his shoulders and turned towards them, a very strange expression on his face.

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Harry was taken aback that Arran, Malfoy and the rest were looking at him to save them. He almost laughed at the irony of it all as he was going to have to fight to live for him self to live in peace once he managed to defeat Voldemort and was still breathing that is. Snape did not want to show Harry the memories he and McGonagall had seen, but Harry knew that was the only way to make sure Arran did not call in the life debt as if he did Harry could not deny him and he could not fulfill the debt either.

"I am going to tell you why I cannot help you and if you can find a way out of this, well, you don't have to ask for help. If I can do anything in any way to help you all, well I will do it."

Now Arran was puzzled as were the other Slytherins.

"I was going to the infirmary one day a few days after the fiasco at the Department of Mysteries with my invisibility cloak on and I saw Ron Weasley who is my friend as Malfoy would have told you, receiving a letter from Fawkes who is the Headmaster's familiar. He and his sister Ginny Weasley were invited to the Order meeting that was held that night and Hermione here and I were not to know about it.

"I attended it in secret after spending the rest of the day in the library seeking out spells to hide my aura, scent and against Mad-Eye Moody's magical eye. I learnt a lot of things in that one meeting to know that I am today fighting not only against the death eaters but also against the Order and the Ministry because of Dumbledore.

"These three are the only ones with me in this fight and I am afraid it will be a fight to the finish just as it will be with Voldemort. I want all of you to see only one memory; one of that Order meeting that I

attended and I am afraid it put me off Order meetings forever and then we can discuss. The only thing I will want from all of you is an oath that you will give me now that you will never reveal this in any manner to anyone without my consent.”

All of them immediately raised their wands and said so mote it be. Harry counted all the wands much to Arran’s amusement and placed his wand on his temple.

Harry removed a strand and placed them into the pensieve and looked steadily at the others. “the memory that I am going to show all of you is true. I swear this on my magic.” A golden swirl of magic came out of Harry’s wand and surrounded him and went into him. Wasting no time, Harry started the pensieve from where all the regular Order members were leaving.

Everyone watched with amazement as the memory played out and Arran’s and the Slytherins faces darkened and the others were stunned at what they were seeing.

There was a deathly silence as the implications of what Harry had shown them sunk in. Snape slowly extended his hand and placed it on Harry’s shoulder and squeezed it softly in an apology, but it was not needed as Harry turned to smile at him, his eyes showing only his happiness at the concern Snape had exhibited for his sake.

Snape smiled reluctantly at him and then turned to Arran. “Seeing this memory you realize how difficult it is for Harry. This is the cottage I brought him to supposedly break him and after certain events the four of us have joined hands to do our best to defeat not only the Dark Lord but Dumbledore and Moody and the Weasley brothers and sister. Don’t call for the debt now Arran, Harry will not be able to fulfill it. Please.’ he finished softly.

“Sir is it only the three or all of the Weasleys involved?” Draco asked him, glancing swiftly at Harry.

“Only those three are involved Draco, as far as we know.” Snape nodded at him.

“What is your true aura? Have you seen it and unlocked your powers and gifts? I can see only a blue one though it has the indication that it has been changed.” Arran asked.

Harry hesitated and looked at Snape for guidance. “His aura is pure silver, thick shining silver, with strong green and golden lines running through it and a very tiny black dot where his scar is. The green lines are thin while the golden is thick and vibrant. Yes, his magic has been released and his gifts unlocked.”

There were loud gasps after Snape said that and Harry also gaped at him at the almost flowery description of his aura. Arran was very impressed and he looked at Harry and saw Harry’s expression and smiled.

“And his gifts? I am asking for a reason Severus and you know none of us could ever betray him now.” Arran asked him intently.

“Parsel Magic, Blood Magic, Dark Arts, Runes, Animagus, Potions, Spell Crafting, Elemental Magic, Wandless Magic and Aura Sight.” Snape told him softly watching his expression closely.

Arran was stunned for a second and there were loud gasps once again as Snape recited all of Harry’s gifts. Then Arran spoke briskly.

“Okay, I have got all of that except the elemental and I know so much of Black Magic. Ria has Runes, Dark Arts, Charms, Potions and spell crafting. My aura is green with thick silver lines and big golden dots. I have subdued the golden and the silver and made it green only. Draco’s aura is green and pink with many big silver dots, and he has Wandless, Runes, potions, Dark Arts and Blood Magic. Blaize also has a pink and a green aura and his gifts are potions, charms, Arithmancy and the Dark Arts. Pansy has a green aura with pink dots and her gifts are the Dark Arts, Transfiguration, runes and potions.

“If all of us and Potter and you three who are as good as they come cannot get together and beat the stuffing out of all of them then I think we deserve to lose and ultimately die. I vote that we give these sanctimonious assess who dare think that they can take decisions for the rest of the world a kick on their butt and also vote we show them a thing or two, in fact I vote we show them a great many things.”

All of them shouted in agreement at that and Arran continued, "We take care of old Snake-face first and," his eyes and face became very bitter and pinched, "his loyal death eaters, the Lestranges, Lucius Malfoy, his wife is not a death eater and I think she should be given a choice later on, Avery, McNair, Ameyctus, Alecto, Rookwood, Crabbe, Goyle, Nott, Parkinson, Zabini, Greengrass and Bulstrode and then go after Dumbledore, Moody and the Weasleys."

"You forgot Wormtail and you are talking about killing your people here." Harry told him hesitantly as he glanced at the others and at Arran who was talking about killing their parents' and talking just like Sirius would have his wayward mind told him and Harry immediately clamped down on that thought.

"What people are you talking about Potter?" Draco Malfoy asked him before Arran could reply with the same bitterness Arran had shown only moments before. "What people are they who tell you that killing someone like Granger or your mother is the right way to live and it is the step that should be taken for the betterment of our world. What blood purity do you think this we will have with this type of narrow minded attitude and these steps taken?"

Blaize took off where Draco stopped unable to continue, "Do you have any idea of the how we live Potter? Draco has to call Granger and the other muggleborns mudblood as often and as loudly as possible and all of us, not Slytherins mind you, but us death eater kids have to insult, act belligerent and loud to one and all. It is a show of power, we have been told. What power we show if we show any at all is debatable but there you are."

Draco stared at him his face flushing and his eyes sparkling with the rage that was dancing in them.

"Potter I love Slytherin, do not doubt it. I and I am speaking for all of us here, will never choose any other House. But today because of this half – breed creature that calls itself the descendent of the mighty Slytherin the entire House has fallen into disrepute. Slytherin was the House for ambition, slyness, achievement and good stature, that's right Potter good stature.

“Today all of us are nothing more than slaves, slaves of not only Voldemort but also our families, who expect us to die for nothing. Giving up our lives for a cause is something, but dying because we are controlled by madman who is just allowing us, no commanding us throw away our lives after killing as many muggles and muggleborns is just not on. Our families are so bent upon the power they will receive when Voldemort wins they are blind to the atrocities they are committing in the name of purification and cleansing of the Wizarding World”

Draco Malfoy was quivering with suppressed rage and helplessness about his situation that looked pathetic to Harry as he saw the proud faces that usually looked at everyone in disdain in Hogwarts now anxious and angry about everything.

“Potter you have to help us. We never trusted the fool of a Headmaster who is primarily responsible for the state of Slytherin House. He has divided the Houses and created an almost unmanageable rift within the School that was not there before he came as a professor of Transfiguration to Hogwarts. He has never cared for us and if our Head of House professor Snape were not so protective of us, most of us would not have survived the hostile environment that exists both at our home and School.” Pansy Parkinson was looking down as she spoke in a low but a very intense voice.

“We will do what it takes Potter to help you, and if we die in the process well, we have given our lives for what we believed in; died in a war that we fought for us and our children of tomorrow, just as the four of you are now fighting. Don’t say no.” Blaise Zabini pleaded with Harry and all of them nodded at that and then there was only silence.

“Wormtail is dead Potter.” Arran said softly into the silence, Harry looked up at him sharply and glanced at Snape to confirm it and as Snape nodded grinning in an altogether happy way that was very disturbing.

“Well the Dark Lord was convinced that he had fulfilled his life debt to you. Poor, poor Wormtail, I am afraid he died not knowing who he was and why he was being killed.” Snape told him viciously smiling

and explained to Harry and the others what had happened with the rat.

Harry was feeling very contrary, both horrified at the way Pettigrew had been killed and happy the man who had betrayed his parents and sent Sirius to Azkaban for thirteen years was no more. "That was very cruel of both of you."

Arran and Snape smiled at Harry's innocence which Snape found amazing. For all that Harry had suffered he should not have any innocence at all and should have become extremely resentful and turned dark. Yet this boy was like a breath of fresh air.

"Cruel of them? Harry the rat betrayed your parents' and he was responsible for Sirius being in prison for thirteen years. Good he went is all I say." McGonagall was very happy. Harry had to agree with her on that point and they refrained from talking more about Peter Pettigrew.

"I think we must take them down one by one," Arran said pensively as he thought about the death eaters. "Pettigrew was easy to tackle because we took him down alone. What do you guys say? Potter you, Draco, Snape and I will get around in this one month while these Ria, Pansy and if you will not mind Miss Granger, you will do research and help us and also come along with us and help us when we need more people for a hunt. For that is what we will do, hunt these people one by one and leave them with the Ministry for the first time, making sure they are good for nothing after we get to them."

Arran looked around at all of them after he finished and saw what they thought. McGonagall, Hermione and Snape looked pleased and he knew Draco, Pansy and Ria agreed, but he could not discern Potter's expression but slowly he nodded.

"What will we do once School starts?" Harry asked him.

"We lie low as we will need the time to plan to act during the holidays." Arran replied promptly.

"So you are saying you divide the time of attacks to three times in a year. Now, Yule and Easter." Harry asked him thoughtfully.

Arran nodded as Draco replied, "Potter what we need to do is to take care of the really bad death eaters, like Avery, Rookwood, Mulciber, McNair as these are in the Ministry and the Lestranges and my father, and Alecto and Ameyctus who kill for fun. That is the core group apart from Ria, Arran and I who are the most trusted among the younger generations.

"The second group or the second circle consists of Crabbe, Goyle, Parkinson, Nott, Greengrass, Bulstrode, and Davies; yes Potter the whole family is with the Dark Lord as is Terry Boots' family, Boot, Flint, Zabini's mother and Edgecombe's mother and all their children."

Snape nodded his head at the names and spoke softly to the others.

"We should be very careful. The Dark Lord may be a crazy maniac and a snake faced git but never forget he is one of the most brilliant wizards and one of the most intelligent ones. One mistake and he would become alert and once he starts really thinking he can arrive at correct conclusions most of the time.

"Even today he was right in thinking I had something to do with Harry's escape. He did not have evidence to back it up, that is all. We must take down the death eaters of the inner core circle first and that will greatly undermine his strength. He will then be forced to do two things, one depend more on us; Arran, Draco, Ria and me and the other thing he would be forced to do will be to use the less experienced death eaters in his second circle whom he does not trust as much.

"Since they are not the death eaters of the kind the Lestranges, Lucius Malfoy or the others are, the Dark Lord will be terribly short of the really good men on whom he actually depends upon. And I do not know if you do Arran, but the Dark Lord has created horcruxes as in plural. Harry has destroyed one and Regulus destroyed another. That was why he was killed. He was seen when he went with Kreacher to the caves to get the horcrux."

Snape was lost in bitter memories as he looked straight ahead his eyes seeing the scene nearly fifteen years ago. McGonagall gasped as Snape had not told her this. He looked at her inscrutably as he added, "Yes Minerva, it was I who went with Regulus to bring the

locket from the caves by the sea. I was standing to watch his back at one place and as he went in, another death eater saw him from another place far away and went off to tell the Dark Lord.”

“The day he was killed was the day I turned to Dumbledore. I had to avenge his death somehow” Snape finished quietly looking down as Arran stared at him a very strange expression on his face.

But all he said was, “Yes I knew about the horcruxes, we all did, but what I did not know was two were destroyed.” Arran said quietly.

Snape looked up, “Then come give Harry your oath and I will take him to the Order and I will try and bring him back here, but if I am not able to, then we will start from Yule. And we will have to be careful about Dumbledore as well. Do not forget that.” He warned Arran and the others.

Arran nodded his head in agreement and then he raised his wand and spoke solemnly, “I Arran Lestrangle,” and at once Draco, Pansy, Blaize and Ria lifted their wands and said their names and then Arran continued, “swear on my magic to help Harry Potter in his fight with Voldemort, Dumbledore and if the Ministry of Magic works against him, then the Ministry as well. So mote it be.”

The others echoed the words as well and then Arran, Draco and the others got up to leave. Arran handed a plain silver ring to Snape and asked him to get in touch with him by saying or thinking the words ‘Regulus and Sirius are brothers’.

Snape scowled at the thought of having to say Sirius’s name let alone think it but as Harry nudged him, he left it at that and did not say a word more.

Arran smiled at that and then all of them left. Draco and Pansy looked awkwardly at Harry and Hermione for a second, “If we do not meet before start of term, remember I will continue to be nasty, more nasty and all those who have taken the mark and that is almost the entire sixth year who will also bait you. Watch your back as I will not be able to help you in the open.” Draco told him looking elsewhere.

Harry did not answer until Draco looked at him frowning that Harry had no response to what he had said, when Harry held out his hand and smiled. Draco flushed the memory of nearly five years coming to the forefront with surprising clarity.

Harry did not let his hand down, nor did he say anything. He merely stood there with his hand outstretched. Draco slowly took it and shook it when Harry drew him close and hugged him briefly. Draco was shocked and before he could say something Harry spoke softly to him.

"I know you will never consider any other House except Slytherin Malfoy, but what you did today along with Parkinson and Zabini probably qualifies all of you for Gryffindor as well. You said I should not mix with the wrong sort way back then and I chose wrongly, but if you accept now, Hermione and I will be proud to be your friends." He finished looking steadily at Draco all the time and Hermione nodded her head smiling as she did.

Draco's jaw hit the floor and he flushed with so many emotions he could not comprehend any one. He just nodded his head as did Pansy and Blaise and smiling very genuinely Arran led all of them out of the cottage.

Harry sagged after they had left with yet another burden of looking out for these people. Snape was even more exhausted and Hermione bustled around bringing the dinner and many nutrient and pepper up potions and alertness potions as Snape would need all his wits around him.

She also asked Harry to take the alertness potion and one dose of the pepper up and then after rehearsing what they would say, they checked their auras and de-scented themselves and took the portkey to Hogsmeade.

Snape had sent word only to Albus and was going to Hogwarts with Harry to meet with him. Snape and Harry landed at Hogsmeade and walked briskly towards Hogwarts to meet Albus Dumbledore.

Harry was still thinking about Arran and his resemblance to Sirius and he sighed as he kept pace with Snape's swift strides to meet the man who had spoilt his life as much as Voldemort had.

Chapter – 13

Chapter – 14

Albus Dumbledore had not slept since the day Harry had vanished and he was currently pacing the floor of his beautiful office. Fawkes was there on his perch looking at his Master and trilling very softly softening the agitation in his breast. He was thinking about Harry as Harry was very important to *his* fight against evil.

For Dumbledore knew it was his fight and his fight alone. He had been born very powerful; his aura was no indication to his real power level. Why his power and aura did not match he did not know but he had been and was brilliant in almost every aspect of magic.

He had mastered the Dark Arts, Blood Magic, Occlumency, Legilimency, Transfiguration and so many other obscure branches of magic. He was highly intuitive and he was blessed with a clear heart and a brave soul. He refused to acknowledge the fact some may call him dominating or manipulative.

That soul had dynamically destroyed Grindelwald and had saved the Wizarding World at one of the most turbulent times the Wizarding World had faced. He had all the accolades he could ever want, the respect he never imagined he would command and anything and everything he would ever want.

But at that time he did not realize he had already committed a grave mistake, a mistake that would haunt him until the end of his days and he was to be blessed with a very long life in which to repent.

Thomas Marvolo Riddle had already begun his career in evil. Dumbledore had the opportunity to look after him when he had met him as the Professor who had gone to the boy's orphanage well before the war with Grindelwald to introduce him to the fact that he was a wizard and he would from then onwards attend Hogwarts to pursue his education.

He had been very disturbed at the mental attitude of the boy and his viciousness even at that age, when innocence was taken for granted. He had ignored it at the time because of the pressing concerns of the

rise of Grindelwald and the mother of all wars that was to wage in the Wizarding World.

Oh he had kept an eye on the boy but had not taken the pains to unravel him and see what had made him tick, tackle the anger and the frustration that had already been burning in him at eleven, an anger at the way he had been abandoned that had made him kill at fifteen and create his first horcrux at sixteen. Only he had not known it then as he had been away from the School for long periods of time participating in the war to hunt down and kill Grindelwald.

After Riddle had left School, he had gone off to Albania and had vanished of the face of the earth and Albus fighting his own war with Grindelwald had all but forgotten about the boy who would return as man and take the Wizarding World by storm and try his best to choke it to its death.

After the death of Grindelwald the aftermath had been truly frightening and it had taken many years to build all that he had destroyed. Dumbledore sighed, no sooner had he spent so much effort and built it all up than it looked as if it would all come crumbling down.

And this time around it would take more than just money and magic to build up the confidence of the people and more importantly the population that was dwindling away. Already they were so few and it looked that by the time this war ended there would hardly be any left. The muggles would not need to resort to witch burning as there would be hardly any left to burn off at the stakes.

After Grindelwald it had fallen to Dumbledore to truly try and rebuild the Wizarding World. He had not even finished it when Voldemort had loomed large on the horizon. Dumbledore had tried to kill him chasing after him and fighting with him, but he had eluded Dumbledore by escaping many times when he should have died, only to return again and again that Dumbledore had suspected that there might be a Prophecy that might have been keeping him alive.

There was and it had not come to light until many years had passed. But Dumbledore had heard it and then he kept a close watch on who the prospective family might be. It had been the Potters. Dumbledore

had initially been thrilled as they were a Light family that had no leanings or connections with the Dark.

When Harry and Neville had been born, Dumbledore had visited with both the families and checked their auras and found to his satisfaction that the child who had the stronger aura was the child who was born on the last day of the seventh month.

He had even taken a little bit of their blood without their parents' knowledge not caring that he was doing something that the children's respective parents' would have not liked and in fact would have threatened him with dire consequences had they known, defeater of Grindelwald or not; and had tested it for gifts and there Harry had impressive gifts that would only aid him in his fight against the evil that was threatening their world.

His world had come crashing down when Harry had managed to defeat Voldemort at fifteen months. Dumbledore had initially been ecstatic and had rushed to Godric's Hollow. The building was stable on the ground floor while there was a lot of smoke coming out of the first and the first sign of the destruction was the fact he could not only remember the house but could see it as well. That did not bode well for the Potters and Albus had feared they had lost the war against Voldemort.

Dumbledore had first cast the anti – muggle wards all over the property and along with Moody who had been the only person to accompany him, had done a good job of obliterating one and all.

Leaving Moody to take care of the muggles Dumbledore had been inside and had almost fallen over James's body. He had walked over him and had run up to the room where the smoke had been coming out.

Lily Potter lay on her side; her arms stretched wide, a look of pleading on her face. The tears had still not dried and a baby was holding on to her robes and sucking its thumb. It had the greenest eyes ever and it gurgled at Dumbledore, a scar shaped like a lightning bolt on his forehead.

Dumbledore had bent down and had checked Lily, but she was very evidently dead. Then his eyes fell on Harry and he looked into Harry's eyes and whispered 'Legilimens.'

He had known right away that Peter was the secret keeper and he had asked for Lily as his prize. Voldemort had given her two chances to stand aside and when she had not budged, had killed her. He had turned to Harry and he had actually cast the killing curse, when little Harry spurred on by some ancient magic that Lily had evoked as she had not taken her wand to fight but had willingly given up her life for Harry's sake, had emitted a golden whirl of raw magic that had made the killing curse rebound on Voldemort.

Peter had taken Voldemort's wand and had disappeared.

He had seen the sheer amount of raw power that had come out of Harry and then he realized Harry holding on to his mother and shaking her. He had lifted the boy and looked at him with his aura sight and that was when Albus Dumbledore had almost dropped him, recoiling in horror as he looked deeply at the scar that reeked of the darkest of magic and was surely a mental link to Voldemort.

He had not realized that Moody was behind him, leviating James Potter as his eyes were glued to the scar and the aura of Harry that was totally Black and was actually emitting fumes.

Moody was all for killing him right then and there but Dumbledore had stopped him knowing that the aura was the result of the killing curse that had touched the boy but had failed to do its task. But the fact that Harry had taken a killing curse head on and had rebounded it on the caster made him special; and that was what Dumbledore did not like that as Harry could become far too powerful, and because of the link he had through the bleeding scar that was on his forehead, he could use that power for evil.

Though he was tempted to agree with Moody he restrained himself and Moody because of one important factor. Harry had been marked by Voldemort and had fulfilled one part of the Prophecy. Now if he could somehow manipulate Harry to listen to him always and become his man through and through then Harry could take care of Voldemort when the time came and then he Albus Dumbledore would take care

of Harry as Harry would always be a danger to himself and to the Wizarding World.

He started planning and Albus Dumbledore was a master planner; he rationalized in his mind and to Moody the importance of keeping Harry Potter alive and well and very much under his thumb. The Wizarding World had had a respite and Dumbledore would take care of it once again and help his world to heal. Harry would be used in the right manner to destroy Voldemort and then he too would say his farewell to the Wizarding World allowing Dumbledore to heal it and nourish it all over again.

He was not an evil man like Voldemort but he had been shouldering the responsibilities of the Wizarding World for far too long and with his domineering nature and his reluctance to see anything that he did not want to, made him commit mistakes he would never admit to, but ones that cost heavily.

His manipulations for his idea of a better world called for sacrifices that he made quite blithely as they did not call upon him to sacrifice, made him in certain ways as evil as the evil he was fighting against. He always justified everything to himself as all his actions being a necessary factor for the good of the Wizarding World.

He did not realize that he made mistakes and he did not realize he treated people like pawns and nor did he realize that he had after Voldemort had risen shunned Slytherin as he had never liked that House from the beginning and had been unfair towards that House and in turn becoming responsible for turning so many of them towards Voldemort and thus in return making things more difficult for the Light.

Now Dumbledore was holding Harry Potter's fate in his hands and he took over Harry's life from that instant onwards. He thought very carefully and decided that it would be for the best if Sirius be imprisoned.

Sirius would allow Harry to grow strong and with a little too much of freedom and be a normal boy and Dumbledore did not want that as then Harry would not obey him and be his pawn in the war.

So he had allowed Sirius to be imprisoned and had placed Harry with the muggles refusing Minerva's requests and pleadings for custody. He had placed Harry with the Dursleys and had placed a mild charm on them to make sure they would not be affectionate towards the orphaned boy.

Though he had minor setbacks especially when Sirius had escaped from Azkaban and Voldemort had resurrected with Harry's blood, and the dementors had come close to sucking the soul from the boy in third year and fifth year, and the incident with the basilisk in his second, Dumbledore had not been upset as he was still in command and had taken care of everything admirably. Giving Harry to Snape who almost broke the boy was another master stroke.

Everything, until now was going to plan and Sirius who had escaped from Azkaban had also fallen, removing the last of the obstacles that Albus feared might draw Harry away from him.

Now, Dumbledore thought as he paced agitatedly in his office, Voldemort had him and Albus prayed that Snape would even at the cost of exposing himself as the spy, save the boy; else all that he had strived for would be in vain.

At that time the wards alerted him to the entry of two persons and Albus heaved a sigh of relief as he recognized Snape and Harry as they came through the wards and waited tensely for them to make an appearance.

Snape looking very tired and scowling heavily and Harry looking pretty normal walked into the room. Dumbledore used his aura sight and almost let out a relieved breath. Harry's aura was the same. Voldemort had not tried to tamper with it.

"Severus!" Dumbledore exclaimed with concern and relief both lacing his voice, "Harry my boy, and how are both of you?"

"Fine Sir." Harry mumbled looking at him and then looking down.

"Sit down, Severus, child what happened? I have been so worried all this time." Albus asked them to sit down and soon there were hot cups of tea from the kitchens. Snape began without fanfare.

“Albus the Dark Lord got Potter and decided to kill him on the spot, no hysterics and no talks, but at the last moment when I was just about to summon Potter to me and use the portkey, Bellatrix’s son told the Dark Lord that he should try and stop the link before killing Potter. The Dark Lord agreed and he asked me to make a potion for him.

“It was a blessing Albus as I learnt later that the Dark Lord had also warded against portkeys and had I summoned Potter both of us would have ended up worse than dead.”

Snape paused here to have a sip of the hot tea and Albus nodded in concern shuddering inwardly about the narrow escape Harry and Snape had had. Snape was invaluable to him as he was the only death eater in the periphery of the inner circle and it would have been a double disaster.

“Then he asked the rat to take Potter to the dungeons and there I went to work. At night when I was sure all were asleep, and I was supposedly researching for a potion to sever the mind link, I went in search of Pettigrew; he was in the library searching potions as were many death eaters. I stunned him, turned him into a rat and took him to Potter’s cell and force fed him the polyjuice with Potter’s hair.”

Dumbledore’s eyes sparkled with anticipation as Snape went on sourly, “The moment he took the polyjuice I cast the permanent charm using blood and also an obliivate, telling him, he was Harry Potter and he would not know anything else.”

Dumbledore nodded, it was a mercy Harry had not been tortured. “I took Potter through the dungeons and out of the wards and told him to activate a portkey he already had for the cottage. Then I went back and stayed until Pettigrew was discovered. The Dark Lord was furious and felt that Pettigrew had honored the debt Potter had cleverly called for and berated him for sending Pettigrew with Potter.

“He killed Pettigrew today and dismissed all of us. I went to the cottage and have brought Potter here. Now I wish to leave. You have Potter and let me spend the rest of my holidays in peace. You must excuse me Albus I am very tired and have not slept since Potter became a guest of the Dark Lord.”

Harry glared at him and turned hopefully to Dumbledore, "Sir may I go to The Burrow for the rest of the holidays?"

Dumbledore saw the glare and he chuckled to himself, smiling gently at Harry, "Harry your lessons with Severus are all the more very important in the light of recent happenings and you must continue with them. Severus, you may take Harry with you and continue where you left off and this time I will not disturb you until School starts. I am glad you and Harry have returned to us safely. I too have not slept since Harry was kidnapped and now I think all of us must hasten to our beds for a well deserved rest."

"Severus, you may tell Voldemort that Harry is at an undisclosed location and not at headquarters and leave it at that. He will think I have carted Harry off somewhere and will not trouble us for the rest of the holidays."

Dumbledore ignored Harry's scowl and Snape's glare and stood up indicating the meeting was over, "I will inform the Order about it tomorrow and if there is anything else I will Patronus you Severus."

There was no answer from both of them as they left scowling sulkily leaving a relieved Dumbledore to his much needed sleep.

Snape and Harry walked quietly to the gates and crossing the wards, portkeyed back to the cottage, where McGonagall and Hermione were waiting anxiously. Snape was too tired to speak and he left Harry to explain everything as he went to sleep.

Harry explained all that had happened to both of them and then all of them went to sleep feeling very relieved about well, everything. The next morning Harry woke up late only to find a note hovering over him. It was from Snape who had written that he was going to meet Voldemort and report what Dumbledore had told him to.

Harry quickly got up and went to make breakfast and started his studies just as McGonagall and Hermione flood in. Soon all of them were going about their work and trying not to worry too much about Snape's absence.

It was almost lunch when Snape followed by Arran, Rhiannon, Draco Malfoy, Blaise Zabini and Pansy Parkinson. All of them looked very tired and Snape and Draco were trembling slightly, indicating the use of the *cruciatius* on them.

Harry ran to Snape and flicking his wand turned both the sofas into reclining couches and helped Snape while Ria helped Draco into another.

"What happened?" Harry asked Arran who was scowling and looking very grim.

"He found out about the Diary and cursed Lucius and as he was still feeling furious even after Lucius fell unconscious, he cast the *crucio* at Draco and then he turned to Severus and cursed him as well as Severus did not bother to tell Voldemort about the diary, the basilisk and the destruction of both. He refused to accept the explanation that Severus had thought them merely dark objects placed by some random death eater and had not thought it important." Arran replied even as Hermione came running up from the potions lab with a large bottle of the anti *cruciatius* and pepper up potions.

Ria took the anti *cruciatius* from her with a thankful smile and conjuring two vials and poured the potion into them and gave one to Harry for Snape and the other she fed to Draco who was beginning to shake a lot more.

It was half an hour later that both of them were coherent enough to speak. Harry however levitated Snape to his bedroom and fed him a sleeping potion and came out to find Draco sleeping as well.

"All of you will not be missed will you?" McGonagall asked Arran who shook his head.

"I told Narcissa I will be taking Draco away for a little while and she was glad to see him go, as he would face the brunt of his father's anger and frustration once Lucius wakes up. Draco may stay here may he not?" Arran asked her looking sideways at Harry who nodded along with McGonagall who said at once that indeed Draco should not go anywhere until he was quite fine.

Arran levitated Draco and placed him on Harry's bed and drew the curtains and then all of them relaxed. Harry enlarged the dining table and he and Hermione started cooking more food for all of them to have.

Harry was feeling very upset and it showed in his unnatural quietness as he boiled with rage inside at what Snape and Draco had to go through.

"Arran", he asked the boy a bit later, a boy who looked so uncannily like Sirius that it made Harry jump a little inside every time he looked at him, "how many horcruxes can a person make?"

"I suppose you want to know how many Voldemort would make?" as Harry nodded Arran thought about it for a minute and then replied, "usually it is not advisable to make more than three, as you tend to lose your human tendencies and Voldemort has already made six and with the amount of Black rituals he has performed on his own body, he is not even a magical creature let alone a human being. So he would not dare make more. Now he has about three horcruxes hidden away unless he has created one more that he did not create with your death sixteen years ago. Then he has four of them plus himself."

Harry shivered as he thought of destroying four horcruxes like he had the diary and then going after Voldemort and his death eaters. It seemed too huge a task to complete in one lifetime.

All of them were quiet for the rest of the day and Harry and Hermione went about their studies with Arran and McGonagall helping them. McGonagall suggested Ria, Blaise and Pansy too study something and soon all of them were immersed in their studies, with Ria looking now and then towards the drawn curtains where Draco was sleeping.

In the evening Pansy and Blaise left for their homes and then it was only them. Draco had not yet woken up and nor had Snape and after dinner McGonagall and Hermione left for the night and then it was Harry, Arran and Ria.

There was an awkward silence once Hermione had left and then it was Arran who broke it.

“Do I look so much like Sirius that you actually mistook me for him?” he asked Harry curiously.

In reply Harry went to his trunk and took out the photo album Hagrid had given him at the end of the first year and turned to his parents’ wedding and showed Arran the photo of a laughing Sirius with an ache in his chest that did not quite let him speak.

Arran watched the photo and was stunned by the resemblance. Why he could pass for Sirius Black. He looked so like him. He silently handed the book to Ria who was amazed at the similarity and looked at Harry.

“I was seven years old when mother and father were imprisoned and we were home schooled by my father’s parents’ who were staunch followers’ of Voldemort. When I was eleven years old, on the 1st of September exactly at midnight, I received a book, some vials containing memories and a pensieve from Regulus who was my uncle as was Sirius. The book that was in the form of journal was written by Regulus and contained information about Voldemort and the atrocities he had committed and listed out the reasons why I should not follow him.

“He pleaded with me in the journal and told me to watch the vials that were memories of Voldemort’s heartlessness and his cruelty and begged me to refrain from making the mistakes he had made and asked me if it got too much to run away from home. He asked me to go to Sirius who he said would never refuse me anything once I swore on my magic I would be against Voldemort.

“In fact he told me to take the name of Black if mother or father would disown me. He told me about horcruxes and how Voldemort had cheated all the pure bloods by marking them as his slaves. He told me about half the Prophecy that Snape and he had heard and informed me that he had heard the whole Prophecy and that even Snape did not know he had heard and Voldemort was definitely going to fail. He asked me to be a Slytherin and choose the winning side.

“The only thing he did not tell me was Snape was with him in everything and he too knew the whole Prophecy. He even told me he had destroyed one of the horcruxes.”

Harry gaped at Arran as he narrated his story listening to the hidden anguish in his voice.

“He probably did not want Snape to be revealed if you did not choose his path.” Harry told him inadequately. Arran nodded as he continued as he looked at the wall in front of him sightlessly.

“I would have been a death eater with the best of them, if not for the fact you had already vanquished Voldemort. He was the most powerful wizard of all times,” he said bitterly, “and was done away by a fifteen month old. That was the one fact that made me think seriously about what Regulus had written. The torture in the vials I witnessed was terrifying to an eleven year old who until then had been thinking about the glory that would be his when he too took the mark like his parents.

“What Regulus, who was until then a traitor to the cause as far as all of us were concerned did, was to make me look at everything with new eyes and perspective. He was not particularly close to me as I was too small when he started distancing from mother and all of us and it touched me at that point as well as confused me that he had cared enough.”

There was a long silence as Harry and Arran sat there thinking about everything.

“So you chose at that time. why didn’t you go to Dumbledore then?”

Arran shook his head, “No I didn’t choose at that time. I read that journal again and again and watched the memories and did what Regulus asked me to do. He asked me to find out for myself if all that he had written was true before choosing. I did just that, I gave the talkative potion to my granddad and made my grandma drunk enough to reveal many things.

“Regulus had warned me again and again in the journal against Dumbledore and he told me only to help the child of the Prophecy either directly or behind the scenes to win the war. I found all that Regulus said was correct and I found so many other disgusting things and it hurt me that my parents’ were ready to abandon me and Ria for

this and not some grand plans as I had thought, for the future of the Wizarding World.

"I was to have approached Sirius as Regulus told me he would protect me but Sirius was already in Azkaban and was also a death eater. At the time no one knew who the person was who was closest to the Potters. Voldemort kept that very close to his chest. It was only two years ago that I knew it was the rat who had not only killed your parents but also made sure I would not be able to escape the fate of becoming a death eater by going to Sirius." Arran said his face taking an ugly look as he thought of Pettigrew.

"The rat has so many things to answer for. Good he is gone." Harry told him viciously as he thought of all that Pettigrew had done. Arran nodded his head as he continued to reminisce about his past.

"I took Ria under my wing and slowly extended it to Draco and his friends. Though, among his friends only two of them were interested. But it was better than anything and I trained very hard and also helped train Ria. I was waiting for an opportunity to meet you and offer my help in assisting you. Now that is done."

Arran was silent after that and Harry was silent as well as he sat in a comfortable silence with Arran and Ria and thought about all that Arran had said. Then the three of them got up and started making their way to conjure camp beds to sleep for the night.

"Won't your people," Harry could not say Bellatrix's name, "be searching for you?"

Arran grinned, "Ah! That's the beauty of it, you see we have created such a bizarre pattern for ourselves; all five of us, that no one would even question us if we did not go home for a few days. They would just think we were muggle baiting. We have kind of built up that reputation over the last few years."

Harry smiled at him and then Arran conjured three camp beds and Harry, Ria and he slept soundly. Draco woke up some time later and seeing all of them were asleep, turned over and went back to sleep again.

In the morning Harry, Arran and Ria woke up to find Draco and Snape already up and looking quite fine. Harry fussed over Snape and Ria over Draco, Hermione and McGonagall flood in and the routine started.

Arran, Draco and Ria left that afternoon and the other four continued their work. Over the next three weeks Arran, Ria, Draco, Blaise and Pansy were frequent visitors to Rose Cottage. All of them worked very hard and there was not much casual conversation among them, though there was an awkward acceptance of each other.

One week before School Arran came early in the morning with a piece of information that would kick start their hunt and war against Voldemort and his cruel men.

"Okay folks, I heard mother and father speaking of two places; one was the old house of the Gaunts and the other was the castle of Ravenclaw. I am presuming there are horcruxes there as mother was saying something about guard duty for the next week until Voldemort would reassess them and enhance their protections as," he grinned at Snape, "Nagini is dying and Voldemort is very worried about her. Mother whispered saying she was one of those and if she died and I think she would not survive the next two days; that would mean the Dark Lord was down to three only."

"That means he created one more after he returned." Snape said thoughtfully as Arran nodded.

"If we can take these two down, then Voldemort would have only one more horcrux and we can even think of capturing him and finding out the last one." Arran said giving Harry a mouth watering picture of a captured Voldemort with Harry and the others demanding him for information.

"Let us divide into two bands and attack the horcruxes simultaneously. That way we can be sure that Voldemort will not move them somewhere else. What do you think?" Harry asked the room in general.

Snape nodded approvingly. "That should do it."

Arran also nodded his head. "Severus and I will separate into two groups as both of us know an extraordinary amount of Black magic. Severus," Arran said turning to Snape, "Will you take Pansy, Ria and Hermione and McGonagall and I will take Harry along with Blaize and Draco?"

He turned to Harry and told him, "I just want us to work together and see if we can pull it off."

Harry nodded his head as did the others.

"We will leave tonight. Minerva, which one will you choose?"

"Rowena's as I know the place and I have actually visited it once before. Then the wards were friendly to allow a Hogwarts professor inside. Now," she trailed off.

"Good. We will try and get around the wards if we can; otherwise we will just break it and be prepared for a fight." Arran shrugged.

"Then I will get the others here as quickly as I can. Severus can you make the portkeys for all of us and also communication rings so that we can wear as an earring so that we can communicate with each other easily?"

Snape nodded and asking Hermione and Harry to follow him to the potions lab he quickly strode downstairs.

"Severus I will go home and from there to Hogwarts and try and get as much information as I can about Rowena and her castle." McGonagall stepped through the floo and went off to research.

They spent the rest of the day making a variety of potions and Harry was excused once Draco and the others came. Hermione, Pansy and Blaize were helping Snape in the potions lab and Harry, Draco and Ria were brushing up their dark arts and Blood Magic. Arran was giving a crash course on horcruxes and the enchantments surrounding them and the means of their destruction and all of them were soon practicing the spells.

Soon they were joined by the others and Hermione and Blaise were asked to brush up on healing charms and Pansy and Ria on various offensive hexes and charms in case they were needed to fight death eaters when Arran, Snape, Harry and Draco were searching and defusing the enchantments around the horcrux.

All of them had a light dinner too nervous to do anything else and soon they were armed with portkeys that hung around their necks as a simple chain, earrings that had been pierced into their left ear and various potions around their waists, all charmed to be feather light. They had everything from pepper ups to the anti – cruciatus, from burns causing potions to potions that would itch all over, and all of them were ready.

Snape had made them memorize the order of the potions on their belt so that no one would throw a healing potion at their enemy by mistake. McGonagall had also suggested taking their brooms and all of them had their broom in their pockets and with a deep breath all of them moved out of the cottage.

Snape, McGonagall, Ria, Hermione and Pansy apparated to Dundee; Hermione was the only one who did not know apparating and she was taken along by McGonagall; and from there all of them took out their brooms and went off behind McGonagall who was riding the broom in a very experienced manner as was Snape. After about twenty minutes of flying, all of them landed in a small village. Overlooking the village there was magnificent castle and all of them flew as close as they could to it.

They got off their brooms, shrunk them and put them in their pockets and casting invisibility charms, started walking towards the gate. Snape had already as had Arran, de-scented and changed the aura of all of them. There was no one there and Snape and McGonagall slowly sent their magic and found there was a barrier.

Snape and McGonagall and Hermione simultaneously recognized the dark mark barrier.

Snape turned to where he thought McGonagall would be standing and whispered, “Minerva, there is a dark mark barrier and that means you and Granger will not be allowed inside. The three of us have the

marks on us and we will go inside and both of you stay here and watch out for death eaters.”

McGonagall replied in the affirmative and Snape, Ria and Pansy went through the barrier and McGonagall and Hermione took their positions a little further away by flying on to a small hill and started keeping watch.

Snape, Ria and Pansy all of them who were marked went inside cautiously. There was no one there and Snape held his wand in his hands and whispered a few words in Latin and the wand spun and lay still, facing to the west of the castle and not inside. Snape and the other two walked cautiously, all the while talking to McGonagall about where they were going.

McGonagall and Hermione could actually see them from where they were as McGonagall had asked them to remove their invisibility charms so that they would know exactly where they were; and added to that McGonagall was also scouting the area for anybody else other than them. Hermione and McGonagall saw them at the same moment.

“Severus, there are four persons at the back and they are approaching rather swiftly. I think they have detected your presence.” McGonagall started her running commentary as Hermione whispered something to Pansy, who immediately took out her bag and started rummaging in it.

“Got it, Granger.” Pansy told her as she took out the Peruvian darkness powder and waited for the other death eaters to come around. She leaned over and whispered to Snape and Ria and both of them nodded once and then seeing four killing curses fly in their direction, Pansy threw the powder and walked slowly, spreading the powder in front of her.

All three of them could not be seen and Hermione and McGonagall kept their commentary to Pansy and Snape respectively.

Snape walked towards an old oak tree as his wand indicated, and saw that the four intruders had also come there and were looking around only they were not able to see anything.

Suddenly, Snape stepped out and going around the tree went behind and pointing his wand at the death eater he recognized as Amycus, who was probably leading the others and said softly, "*Imperio*."

A glassed look came over the death eater whom Snape called over to his side and pointing his wand said a small chant that sounded like a song and then gave a few instructions, "You will go to the other side of the castle and wait there for three hours with your friends. You will not remember this interlude at all. Go and act as normal as ever. Exactly three hours later go alone to the front and re-erect the barrier." He said softly watching as the huge death eater gathered the others and walked off saying there was no one here and they should not stand there as it would look suspicious.

The moment they left and McGonagall confirmed it, Snape went to work, dismantling the wards along with Ria and Pansy who were also working furiously. It took Snape the better part of the three hours well versed as he was in the Dark Arts and Black Magic to finish dismantling the wards.

In the hollow of the magnificent oak tree that must have been there from the time of the Founders' was a book. It looked like an ordinary book, but Snape knew better. There was only about forty-five minutes left and Snape had to remove traces of their presence and also magical traces from the environment in case Voldemort called for the trees to tell him what had happened.

Snape carefully levitated the book and conjuring a wooden box, placed it into that and sealed it and taking out a portkey he fixed it to the box and activated it. Heaving a sigh of relief, Snape started the process of removing the evidences of their presence and he finished it with ten minutes to spare.

Snape had sent Ria and Pansy out the moment the horcrux left and had told them to stay just inside of the wards and the moment he finished he ran towards the barrier and went out through it along with the other three and telling McGonagall and the others to activate their portkeys, checked the barrier to see if it was standing fine and in a swift stroke brought it down.

Casting invisibility charms he waited for Amycus to re- erect the barrier and move over to the other side, and then removing all traces of his presence Snape activated his portkey.

He joined the others at the cottage and sent Ria and Pansy home immediately, concealing their earrings, charming them invisible and then slumped on the sofa and took a deep breath.

Hermione was trembling as was McGonagall who actually hugged him as he handed him a well deserved drink, "Merlin, you were brilliant." Hermione nodded fervently, "Yes Sir, you were astounding."

Snape flushed a little even as he scowled and scoffed at the genuine praise from his colleague and his student. Harry and the others were yet to arrive and Snape was praying all would go well there and Harry and the others would return safely with another horcrux.

End of Chapter – 14

Chapter – 15

While Snape and the others had had a relatively eventless trip, Arran, Harry, Draco and Blaize were not so fortunate. Arran apparated along with Harry while Draco and Blaize apparated by themselves.

They had apparated to the village of Little Hangleton and casting aura concealing charms and notice-me-not charms and silencios on themselves the four of them walked swiftly to the falling down Gaunt residence.

As they crossed the House on the Hill that was the Riddle House where the unfortunate Riddle's had lived, Arran and Harry began to get very uneasy as both of them felt a prickling at the back of their necks.

Harry stopped a second before Arran did and Draco who was walking behind him almost bumped into Harry. He opened his mouth to tell Harry to watch it when Harry suddenly pulled him down and also kicked Blaize with his leg and pushed him down. Arran turned frowning to see around and a stunner caught him in the chest and three more whizzed past where Harry and the other two were standing.

Harry enervated Arran even as he was lying down and removed the silencing charms from all them. Arran opened his eyes but did not get up. He turned his head cautiously to the side from where the shots had come but there was no one there.

He slowly sent out his magic upwards and found invisible lines like the infra – red rays and immediately withdrew his magic as one killing curse whizzed past where the line was.

He removed the silencios and told the others what he had found in low tones. They were horrified as Arran told them the stunner and then killing curse was not fired by a person but came automatically when the line was breeched.

“Now I do not want any of you to move an inch towards the house. Wriggle away slowly the same way we came, as if one of those lines are at ground level we would be sitting ducks for who ever is hitting out at us. The last curse was not a stunner but the *Avada Kedavra*. Come on.”

Hearts thudding loudly, all the four of them went back and after wriggling for almost ten minutes, they got up and ran to the trees at the side of the road and waited for another five minutes catching their breaths and trying to look nonchalant, but failing miserably as it had been very scary out there for a few minutes.

Arran sent a conjured mouse flying at the waist level where the invisible line had been, only this time he sent it among the trees to the front of him and found the mouse flying smoothly. He summoned back the mouse and placing it near the pavement where the road started and sent it forward again. The second it hit the line two trees before them, it was hit by a killing curse and disintegrated.

Arran conjuring as many rats as was needed got an idea about the boundary of the protective lines. Then they went forward keeping well behind the trees and peered cautiously, but none of them could see anything.

After a few minutes of simply gazing helplessly Harry suddenly got an idea, “Arran,” he said softly, “Why don’t I conjure snakes and try and send them in? Voldemort may have allowed snakes to go through the lines unharmed as no one can control them unless they speak to them and no death eater except Voldemort is a Parselmouth.”

Arran looked at him contemplatively for a second before nodding his head once.

Harry wasted no time. He thought hard of Nagini and conjured a huge snake exactly like her and Draco and Blaise yelped a little before glaring at Harry. Arran too, was taken aback at the replica of Nagini but kept silent as Harry hissed to the snake and told her to move towards the Gaunt House and watched impatiently as the snake swayed and moved.

The snake went through the invisible lines safely but could not get into the house. Arran saw that and decided to act as the more time they were spending here the more dangerous it became. He quickly conjured up three pairs of spectacles, as Harry already had his own and placing each of them in his hand chanted once again in that ancient language and handed it to everyone.

“Now yours Potter.” And charmed the glasses and handed it over to Harry. Harry put it on and found that he could see the invisible lines that were red in color and emitting some kind of fumes.

“Come on. We have to use blasting curses to blast away those lines. Draco and Blaize you will start using this spell on the lines one at a time. Harry you and I will fight the death eaters who will come the moment the first line is broken.”

Harry nodded and Arran turned once more to the other two who had their wands ready to fire.

“There is no wand movement whatsoever and all you have to do is point and fire. Remember the moment you are hit or hurt activate the portkey and get the hell out of here. No standing back to help the others or anything. Is that perfectly understood?” Arran looked sharply at all of them and all of them looked at each other before nodding reluctantly.

Before they could start, Harry flicked his wand a few times conjured about a hundred snakes and Harry hissed to them. The other three were baffled at the amount of rather big snakes that were hissing very loudly.

“All of you stand in front of us and protect us. Twenty five to each.” Harry commanded and turned and told Arran and the others what he had done.

“See, there will be about twenty five snakes in front of each of us and by the time the killing curses reach us we should have broken the lines and got to the house. There we can fight with the death eaters and get inside to tackle the horcrux. All right?”

Arran blinked at him once and then, “Brilliant!” was all he said.

Harry hissed to the snakes and commanded them to take their positions and watched as the snakes went through the line harmlessly without being attacked and then Arran gestured to Draco and Blaize when Harry once again stopped Arran and the others. He then smiled at them and lifted his wand

“Protectoremovase.” The soft command came from his mouth as Harry hissed the spell in Parseltongue. The spell hit the line and the line vanished completely.

Arran immediately conjured a rat sent it flying through the air at the level where the line was and watched in amazement as the rat flew safely until it hit the second line and a killing curse hit it.

Harry without another word started firing the curses in Parseltongue at the other lines and soon all of them slowly walked down the road to where the Nagini look alike was still slithering there. More than half the snakes were killed as killing curses came every time a protection line was brought down.

The other snakes were now slithering along with them and Arran, Harry, Blaize and Draco lifted their wands as one and standing well behind strong shields and blasted the door away. Harry for good measure hit the door hissing away in Parseltongue.

There were six pops the moment the door was blasted away and Harry spurred the snakes including Nagini to attack them. Arran had already stunned one and was fighting furiously with another of them and Draco and Blaize were fighting one each.

The remaining two turned to Harry and banished the snakes before they could rush at them and bite them. Both of them cast killing curses and Harry remembering Dumbledore’s duel with Voldemort in the Department of Mysteries, hurriedly conjured two snakes to accept the curses and followed by a stunner that caught one death eater square on the chest.

“Intestina remova,” shouted the remaining death eater as Harry rolled on the floor to avoid the bright orange curse that would have removed his intestines and fired his first dark curse, *“parsa boila parsa,”* that showered a bucket of boiling water on the death eater, who yelled as

the boiling water poured on him and he cast another killing curse as he rolled away. Harry conjured a block of stone to block it and ran as the stone broke into tiny pieces.

Then the curses flew thick and fast between Harry and the death eater, '*fervidus, rubeo castra, ferula blasta*', and so on. After some time when both of them showed no signs of giving up, and Arran who had just finished with his own duel was about to interfere saw Harry hissing as he rolled away from yet another killing curse followed by a *crucio*. Harry escaped the *avada kedavra* but was hit by a *crucio* and screamed.

Arran lifted his wand to simply kill the death eater when the death eater slipped on a piece of rock and fell face down removing the curse from Harry as he yelled in shock at his stumbling.

Harry turned over, still shivering at the curse and to Arran's amazement, did not pause to take a breath but hissed *confundus* in Parceltongue and followed up by the same spell and watched as the death eater blocked the first as he was getting up but was hit by the next and immediately hit three stunners one after the other and conjuring ropes, bound him and the other death eater who was already stunned.

Harry slowly got up assisted by Draco who was trying his best not to look too concerned and hit the other death eater with another stunner for good measure and turned to the others.

Arran and Blaize were standing with the other four bound and tied securely, wands at the ready to assist Harry. Arran took out a vial of the anti-cruciatus and poured it down Harry's throat and watched the trembling slowly stop.

Arran stared at Harry for a second and he was just then beginning to understand the tenacity that Harry possessed and his respect for the young boy who carried the Wizarding World on his shoulders went up a notch as saw how Harry had without fuss and with a harsh *cruciatus* on him still managed to stun the death eater and bind him.

Harry smiled at all of them and leaving Blaize with the death eaters went inside. Arran then did what Snape had pretty much at the

Ravenclaw castle and giving instructions to Harry and Draco to assist him, started dismantling the enchantments on the horcrux that was inside an old and dusty cauldron.

Once they had finished Arran levitated the horcrux and placed it in a box and went outside and placing a portkey on the horcrux, sent it to the cottage. Then asking Harry to stay on guard here, Arran, Draco and Blaize apparated to just outside of the cottage with a death eater each, on their arm and there leaving Blaize on guard, Arran and Draco returned to take the other two, requesting Harry to stay hidden there.

They came back and as soon as Draco went back with the last death eater Arran started removing any trace whatsoever of their presence, both magical and otherwise. He had asked Harry to stay as he taught Harry on the job as he was effortlessly casting spell after spell to do so, explaining to Harry all the while.

Once they had finished, Arran took Harry's hand and apparated to the cottage where Draco and Blaize were standing and promptly dismissed them to go back to their homes so that they would not be suspected once the loss of the horcruxes came to light.

The moment they left, Harry ran inside to check if Snape and the others had returned and found Snape restlessly pacing the floor and McGonagall and Hermione sitting in the sofas and sipping hot tea. The horcrux had come but there was no sign of the others and Snape was beginning to feel very restless and worried.

All of them turned as the door opened and Harry peeped inside. Snape strode over to him and hugged him briefly and looked him over.

"Severus, you are fine and did you get it?" he asked as Hermione and McGonagall came over to him and Hermione smilingly hugged him hard making him blush just a little.

Snape smiled at Harry's blush and he nodded his head, "We had no problems."

“Well we had and we fought our way through and we have got the death eaters out side the cottage with Arran standing guard. He wanted me to call you if you had come back.”

Snape wrenched the door open and ran out followed by Harry, Hermione and McGonagall.

Arran was waiting there and he was very relieved to see Snape. That meant Snape was successful as well.

“You got it?” Snape nodded his head looking at the six death eaters. Arran had removed their masks and Harry saw their faces. Four of them he did not recognize but the other two were known to him. One was Marcus Flint and the other death eater who had *crucioed* Harry was none other than Rabastan Lestrangle.

Harry looked at him shock; he was Ria’s father and Arran’s uncle.

Snape was enervating the death eaters and all of them shook their heads bemusedly as they found themselves tied down in the middle of no where. Rabastan looked around for a second before his eyes fell on Harry and he spat at him, before turning to see who else was there.

He almost fainted in shock as he saw Arran standing by Snape and glaring at him. “Arran, did this half blood put you through the *Imperio*? Child what are you doing with Potter who is the greatest enemy of our Lord and this traitor Snape whom our Lord will surely kill for his betrayal?”

Arran did not answer him, but went a little away and spoke into his ring to Ria. A minute later he came back and nodded at Snape.

Snape obliterated all the four death eaters and Arran chanted in the ancient language of the Celts and locked the charm and also removed any trace of their magic from them. Arran then stunned them and turned to his uncle.

“Your daughter has given me permission to kill you uncle.” He said softly as Rabastan looked at him with wide eyes and open mouth.

“Impossible.” Rabastan spluttered as his face took on a pleading look. “Arran our Master trusts you the most, and for Merlin’s sake do not betray him. You have the world at your feet and he has already hinted to Bella and Rudolphus that you will be his heir. Do not throw all the power and the glory that is at arm’s length away.”

As Arran stood there impassive, Rabastan’s face took on an ugly look as he continued, “You know first hand what the consequences for such betrayal would be and I know personally that Ria would never say that Arran, you know it as well. I love her as I do you and she knows that. In the name of Mordred please Arran come to you senses, come back to where you belong.”

“You don’t know me well then do you father?” came a voice from the darkness as Ria walked out of the cottage to where she had portkeyed in.

“Ria!” Rabastan was astounded as he looked at his daughter and for the first time there was a look of fear in his face as he looked at Arran and Ria alternatively.

“I do not mind dying for a cause daddy, but you are asking for my life because of a madman’s personal revenge against a sixteen year old boy. After the horcruxes,” Rabastan drew a sharp breath but she continued as though she had not seen that, “that thing you call Lord and master is not even human and what is he doing for our world daddy? To save it from many evils that is surrounding it today? Nothing daddy as he is the one who is contributing to most of it.”

“Ria!” Rabastan bellowed in fear, “What has happened to you that both you and Arran that you are speaking like this?” struggling with the binds Rabastan turned to Snape and Harry as he snarled, “You, you... what have you done to my children?”

“Daddy they have not done a single thing. All that has been done, all of you have done it. You will never understand Daddy. Goodbye.” Ria turned away tears in her eyes as Rabastan gaped at her, “You have gone mad. Our Master will kill you Ria. Arran you will die as well. This is how you want to live so be it, but remember before you even plan to live my Master will kill you both and, you Snape! You will die a

most horrible death for your part in all this.” Rabastan shouted at them.

Arran who had been standing silently until now came forward sneering at Rabastan, “My dear uncle, it is not us who have chosen wrongly, but it is you and your death eaters. You wish your daughter and nephew dead because we do not agree to bow down to a madman. And what a madman he is uncle,” Arran’s voice turned very bitter as he glared at Rabastan pulling Ria who was now weeping openly to him, hugging her tightly.

“What a shame he is and what a shame you are Rabastan. Your Master died at the hands of a fifteen month old child and, could not, even with six horcruxes, regain his body for thirteen years and now, all his energies are spent only on one thing. Capture Harry Potter. Kill him while he is bound and magic subdued, because in a duel the blasted boy might just get away like he did in the graveyard; and after killing the Boy-who-Lived, become the undisputed ruler of the Wizarding World?”

Rabastan gaped at Arran as though he did not understand what the boy who was deemed to become Voldemort’s heir was speaking.

“Well I do not work that way. I am Slytherin uncle dear as mother told me that the Slytherin House was the House I would have been sorted in if I had gone to Hogwarts and I am afraid as a Slytherin I chose the winning side. That is definitely not Voldemort’s side or even Dumbledore’s. Goodbye. Oblivate!” Arran’s voice rang out in the stillness of the night and he started the chant in a soft voice and soon he had stunned Rabastan as well.

Arran’s face was very bitter and angry as he stood there and Snape briefly touched the brave boy who had the gall to go against his uncle. Arran turned a frowning face to Snape and struggled to get his emotions under control.

“What do we do now with these gits?” he bit out.

“Portkey them to the Ministry and we will let the aurors take it from there. Pull up your Occlumency and act properly. All of us will be called the moment the Dark Lord comes to know of two things, the

loss of his horcruxes and his servants. But first we must destroy the horcruxes before we send them to the Ministry of Magic. Come on Arran. Harry, Minerva will you stand guard here?"

As they nodded Snape and Arran went inside and came out after half an hour, successfully destroying the horcruxes as Snape and Regulus destroyed one so many years ago.

Arran hugged Ria who hugged him fiercely and clung to him as Snape made the portkeys and disguised them so that no one would know who made them and the place from where they were sent to the Ministry of Magic.

Arran and Ria then apparated to their home and Snape sent all of them together to fall in a heap at the Atrium in the Ministry of magic.

Then all of them went inside after once again Snape removed any trace of magic performed there as he and Arran had done quite a bit of Black magic and ancient magic outside the cottage.

Harry recounted all that had happened after Snape told him how easily they had got the horcrux from Rowena's castle. When Harry told them how he had been hit by the cruciatus Snape got up at once from his seat to sit down with Harry who had been leaning against Snape's legs and checked him once all over not minding Harry's protests that he was alright and would Snape stop fussing please.

Once he was satisfied Harry was alright except that he was tired, he summoned another vial of the sleeping potion and a healing Draught and told him to go straight to bed.

Harry hugged Hermione, thinking how nice it was to hug her and promptly blushed at that thought and where it was leading him. He stepped back to see Hermione blushing as well and Snape and McGonagall trying to hide their smiles. Harry scowled at Snape and then suddenly yawned hugely and Snape laughed outright at that and pushed him gently towards his bed.

All of them said their goodnights and went off to their respective rooms and beds to get a well deserved rest. All of them slept soundly

knowing there would be total chaos the next day and wanting to be fresh for it.

Two A.M at the Ministry of Magic the next morning....

Amelia Bones was the Head of the Auror Force in Wizarding Britain after Rufus Scrimgeour was transferred to the Special Forces that took care of wizard security after the rise of Voldemort once again, stepped out of the floo and into a chaos. She had been sleeping soundly when a message had woken her up.

She had been called on an emergency to the Ministry by Moody. Auror Shacklebolt and Mad-Eye Moody had been going home after a long day of raids and they had filed the paperwork on the work they had been doing and had been on their way out tired and wanting to get home at about a quarter to two in the morning and had found six death eaters stunned very powerfully and magically bound very securely in the Atrium.

The portkeys that were obviously used to transport them from somewhere had vanished, telling Moody and Shacklebolt the power of the castor, who had not only the ability to transport someone into the Ministry in the first place, but had vanished the portkeys after use in the second place. That was power that was almost equivalent to Dumbledore's and according to Moody that was not a good sign.

He had called Amelia at once and also sent a patronus to Dumbledore next. Shacklebolt also sent messages to Arthur Weasley and Tonks so that they could snoop around and see if there was anything more to this.

Amelia stepped out of the floo and walked briskly to the questioning cells in the Ministry. Dumbledore was already there along with Shacklebolt, Moody, Tonks and Brian Wheeler her deputy. He grinned at her as she came in and gesturing at Dumbledore scowled at her for his presence.

She frowned as well. She had never liked Dumbledore as she found him too manipulative and very inconsiderate of others, but he was too

powerful and all she could do was to grit her teeth and get on with it. Brian too, did not like Dumbledore as he was a Ravenclaw with many friends in Slytherin and he knew just how harsh Dumbledore could be.

Now though she put everything behind her and smiled at Dumbledore, glancing warningly at Brian to behave. Brian grimaced but kept quiet. "Hello Albus, what is this we have here? Are your people responsible for this by any chance? I thank you from the bottom of my heart for Rabastan Lestrangle alone and the others are bonuses."

Dumbledore smiled at her as he replied gently, "No, I do not have a clue as to what happened. I was waiting for some information from Alastor when I received his message that he may be delayed because of the six death eaters and here I am."

Amelia smiled though she frowned inside. How dare Moody message Dumbledore about death eaters? He was not an auror was he, that he thought that he could just waltz right in and sit down on the investigations with them. She sighed inwardly. There was no use contemplating such things. Dumbledore ran the Ministry. She had to grouse to herself and get along with it.

She looked at Brian. He was scowling too and looking at the warning in her eyes he grimaced once again before adopting his professional face and led her to the bound death eaters. There were six of them and the main death eater so as to speak was Rabastan Lestrangle.

"All of us came here just a minute ago. They were stunned but I enervated them and they have been like this unnaturally quiet." Brian told her. She frowned as she looked at all of them.

She flicked her wand and ran it through Rabastan and found traces of oblivate. "He has been obliterated that is all. Brian get the anti obliterating potion and the veritaserum please."

The anti obliterating potion was one of the truly magnificent inventions of the Wizarding World. The wizard who created it was none other than Severus Snape at the request of Albus Dumbledore and it had been tested and proved magnificently accurate and had led to many amazing discoveries. No one apart from the inner circle of the Order of the Phoenix and the top aurors knew about it.

What Amelia did not know while Dumbledore did was that all the death eaters knew about it as Snape had told Voldemort before handing the potion to Dumbledore. Dumbledore had been angry at first but had to back off when Snape had pointed out the fact that if any death eater in the Ministry went to Voldemort with it the Order would lose its only spy who was almost in the Inner Circle.

Brian Wheeler went swiftly to get the potions and returned in a minute with a big vial of each. He poured them into smaller vials that Shacklebolt conjured and Tonks and he poured it down the throats of all the six death eaters. They drank it without any objections or struggles and kept silent.

There was absolutely no reaction whatsoever. All of them sat like they had before the potions. This was the first time the potion had not worked and Dumbledore was scared that Voldemort may have brewed an anti dote without Snape's knowledge.

Amelia frowned as the implications of the failed antidote to the oblivate charm but also the veritaserum was not working. The eyes of the death eaters had not glassed over nor had they any other sign of being under any type of curse or spell other than the oblivate and even that was not very strong.

She turned to the others and sat down in her chair, gesturing the others to sit down as well.

"Well what do you think? Who has the power today to do something like this?" she asked baldly.

"Voldemort, Bellatrix Lestrange, Rudolphus, Rabastan himself, Lucius Malfoy, and I are the ones truly capable of casting the charm today. Draco's aura is powerful no doubt but whether he has the will or the temperament is debatable."

Amelia was shocked. "Albus are you trying to say on our side you are the only one capable of casting such a charm?"

"Yes Amelia. This type of spell casting would need sheer power and a knowledge that can come only by age or by intense study or all types

of rituals. In my case it is a combination of age and painstaking work.” He smiled at her astounded expression.

“You must not take the death eaters lightly just because they indulge in torture, my dear. They are truly fearful because they have the knowledge and the power that is extraordinary. That is why we have been fighting a war for so long.” He said softly very worried.

Amelia heard the worried expression in his voice and frowned at him deep in thought, “Whose work do you think this type of spell casting could be Albus and what is this anyway?”

His answer stumped her and terrified her immensely and she understood why the usually unflappable Dumbledore was so worried. “I do not know.” He said gently. “That is why I am worried Amelia. I do not know the spell that has made them so still in mind. They have no recollection of anything and have no magic in them, almost.”

“How in the name of the Great Goddess did these death eaters get portkeyed in here? That should have been impossible, shouldn’t it have?” she asked.

Dumbledore nodded but gently shrugged his shoulders as he had no clue as to how these death eaters had bypassed the wards and had come inside. That was another mystery.

“Perhaps we should call for the unspeakables...” Amelia’s voice trailed away as she looked at her deputy and glanced around at the others.

Dumbledore nodded his head at once telling Amelia the seriousness of the lack of information about the condition of the death eaters.

She pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed as she walked over to the floo and spoke the secret word to gain access to the unspeakables reception.

The unspeakables were always hooded with a special robe that would hide their physical statistics like, height, weight, hair and eye color and aura etc. they also had a voice modification charm so that even their near kith and kin would not recognize them.

Amelia spoke to the witch who was there. She was not an unspeakable but would, by means of a communication device not unlike a telephone would relay the message to Merlin knows where and someone would come striding out.

Three unspeakables came striding out of nowhere and Amelia knew the next time they would come out into the reception room from another direction and she smiled at the unspeakable and withdrew her head only to have the three of them floo in right away.

They went to the death eaters and each of them took two of the death eaters and started working on them at once. All the others present in the room watched with fascination as the unspeakables went to work.

The unspeakables worked silently casting many charms and spells on the death eaters who had to still open their mouths and utter a word. Two hours later they admitted defeat as nothing they did had any effect whatsoever and they had called in reinforcements as well and four more unspeakables had joined them and there was no change nothing.

All the unspeakables save one went through the floo to their offices. The lone unspeakable cleared his throat and spoke directly to Amelia Bones.

"They have been removed of almost all the magic in them. They have been obliterated and then they have been spelled to lock the charm in place. We think it was a death eater squabble as; as far as we know there is no one on this side who is capable of magic like this."

"Is... is it Black magic?" Amelia asked the unspeakable who was already turning to leave.

"No it is the ancient magic of our land and it is not an ordinary witch or wizard who has done this. We have no records of any one who knows ancient magic. That is why we could not reverse it as this type of magic is almost impossible to reverse without the right knowledge or power."

Dumbledore was astounded. Ancient magic was one branch he did not know. That was why he could not do anything. But he also did not

know who could. That was alarming as who ever did was a fount of power that should by right be harnessed by him, Albus Dumbledore. He was very worried indeed.

“What is their condition now?” Dumbledore asked the unspeakable who already had one foot in the floo.

“They are good for nothing and have no working mind left and they are as good as dead.” And the unspeakable stepped inside.

Amelia Bones turned in shock to the death eaters who were simply sitting there. Their souls were not sucked but they had almost no magic and no working brain.

“The merciful thing to do with these people Amelia would be to kill them off; they will be of no use to us or anyone else as without their magic they will die most painfully.” Dumbledore told her his mind racing with so many thoughts the prime one being who was the person responsible for this type of magic.

He or she had removed the magic and started the process of slow death that was a torturous thing and could not be reversed. The best thing would be to spare them the pain and kill them in mercy.

She nodded, “I will get the Orders from the Minister and do it. Until then, Brian, Moody, Kingsley and you Tonks please guard over them.” She smiled at them, “I know you are tired but you may go home for the day after we finish this.” All of them nodded in agreement and waited for Amelia to come with the Order from the Minister.

She came back with Fudge and Malfoy half an hour later.

“Dumbledore! What are you doing here?” Fudge spluttered as he saw the man he hated on the Light side and on the Dark it was Voldemort and both of them were always giving him huge headaches.

“What do we have here?” Lucius Malfoy drawled even as he shriveled inside at seeing the group that was meant to guard a horcrux. And Rabastan Lestrage. Merlin! How had he been captured and found like this here?

No one answered him and Lucius Malfoy really did not need any; he knew what they had there and the only thing in doubt was who had done this. Malfoy shivered slightly. Who ever had was so powerful it was going to be yet another problem for his Lord. He shivered a bit more noticeably when he realized he would have to give this information to his Lord.

Fudge asked Amelia many questions and Malfoy noted carefully both the questions and the answers and then Fudge finally gave the Order for their execution.

Sending the six death eaters to their deaths, all those present in the room went to their respective homes deeply disturbed, worried and alarmed at what had happened.

Dumbledore called for a top level Order meeting and he sent a Patronus to Snape as well asking all of them to come over at lunch time.

Amelia Bones called for a high level meeting with all the top aurors to discuss the capture and the state of the six death eaters.

Fudge went to his home smiling as he could now proudly say six death eaters were captured by his Ministry who was fiercely fighting this war for the people and become their hero.

Lucius Malfoy went home to take an alertness potion and two doses of a calming draught and to pray to the ancient goddess Hecate to save him from the wrath of his Lord.

End of Chapter – 15

Chapter – 16

At Voldemort's Mansion

It was about three days after the escape of Harry Potter but Voldemort was not thinking of him. He was very worried about Nagini as she had been unwell for the last few days. The last three days to be precise. She was not eating properly and she was beginning to reek of rotten and dead flesh. Voldemort not trusting anyone had brewed the necessary potions to heal his beloved familiar but to no avail. She was slipping away and that was that.

She was also a horcrux and that was another important reason why Voldemort had not entrusted her healing to anyone else. Now, it looked as if she would die soon. The last week had been terrible for Voldemort. He brewed as many potions as he thought would be necessary for Nagini but to no avail. Another week later the room where she was began to smell so badly that even Voldemort had to protect his head before entering to feed her potions and stuff.

The next week after that Nagini stopped eating and she could not even swallow the potions that Voldemort force fed her. His temper was short and many death eaters suffered the brunt of his anger and worry. The night Rabastan had been captured Nagini stopped breathing. Voldemort did not know of it as she died very, very early in the morning. The horcrux also died as it could not survive after the host had died. So the horcrux died with Nagini.

One of the unspeakables who had questioned the death eaters had been Rookwood who worked at the Department of Mysteries as an unspeakable. The other who knew about the losses that Voldemort had suffered was Lucius Malfoy. Both of them knew about the fact that Rabastan was guarding a horcrux of Voldemort.

Lucius especially was terrified as he had without his knowledge destroyed a horcrux when he had placed the Diary into the Transfiguration book of Ginny Weasley and had almost been killed for

it. While he did not care a whit about Ginny Weasley the destruction of the horcrux landed him in so much trouble with his Master.

Now to go and tell his Lord about the capture of all the six persons who were in charge of protecting another horcrux was bad. To say they were as good as dead was to invite a crucio if he was unlucky and a killing curse if he was lucky for if his Master were to remember his mistake with the Diary, Lucius knew that he would consider the killing curse the most merciful.

For that was what Voldemort would do. He would torture the messenger because he could not punish the actual people involved. Lucius Malfoy swallowed hard and did not notice his son who was looking at him in speculation from where he was hiding. Even if he had it was doubtful he would have cared at present.

With a final prayer he took a look around his elegant drawing room and hoped this would not be the last time he was looking at it and apparated to the mansion of his Lord and Master, Lord Voldemort.

Rookwood was also in a similar state as he stepped into the interrogating room along with the other unspeakables to check the captured death eaters. He had seen first hand the anger of Voldemort when Avery had been unable to get the Prophecy. Now as he tried all sorts on an un-responding Rabastan, he was very worried and very scared.

Malfoy had almost been killed and he was even now recovering from the cruel curses Voldemort had cast on him when he came to know that he had unknowingly handed over the horcrux to Ginny Weasley that had later been destroyed by the bloody Potter.

He trembled to think of his Lord's reaction to this latest crisis after the fiasco with Potter and before that the inability to get the Prophecy. He saw Malfoy and felt just a little better that he would be sharing his curses with Malfoy. He shuddered once again and tried all sorts of things, even Black magic, but nothing worked.

He sighed and went back to his rooms to change and leave for Voldemort's hideout if the huge mansion could be called that and explain. If he hid he might be punished more. He left his offices and

went out knowing no one would ask questions as he had already established an eccentric routine over the years.

Lucius Malfoy reached the mansion and walked into the wards not betraying the fear he was experiencing and swiftly walked inside. He went into the main chambers and not seeing anyone, it was still very early in the morning after all, he snapped his fingers.

The next second there was an elf standing before him. "Go and tell our Lord that I have come and I have some news of importance that our Lord should know. I will wait here for him."

The elf popped out and left Lucius standing there. In other circumstances he would have sat down, but not now. He stood there as if carved out of ice, like a statue waiting for Voldemort to appear.

Voldemort came striding in and he was not pleased to see Lucius Malfoy so early in the morning. He glared at him. Nagini was dying and he was totally frustrated. He did not know she was dead already, if he had the anger he would have unleashed would have killed Malfoy.

"What is it Lucius? Why have you come so early in the morning?" Lucius Malfoy bowed deep and stood up straight and proud. Sniveling in front of the Dark Lord or showing fear was one sure way to get the crucio on you for at least three minutes.

"I have been up even earlier Master. At around three in the morning Fudge called me at my Manor telling me that some death eaters were captured. As you know Master I have paid him enough money and have made him promise me that he would call on me day and night if any death eater were captured as I wanted to see them bound to make up for the ignominy I suffered at their supposed hands."

Voldemort nodded impatiently fingering his wand threateningly and Lucius Malfoy continued hurriedly.

"Today Fudge called me to say six of them had been captured and one of them was Rabastan Lestrage." After that Malfoy did not dare

utter a word. He bowed his head and stood still and alert and slightly resigned to accept the inevitable crucio from his Master.

“And?” that one word came like a whip shot and Lucius Malfoy looked up and trembled at the rage that ran on his Lord’s face. He wanted to hurry into speech to tell Voldemort everything he knew but he dared not be the one to tell his Lord to assume the horcrux was probably gone and his death eaters were to be put to death. So he trembled and tried to think of a way to express what he had seen but before that he was cursed in anger as Voldemort knew what the news would be if Rabastan was captured.

“*Crucio!*” Malfoy screamed under the curse that was cast with almost all of Voldemort’s power thrown into it. Voldemort took it off after a minute and left Malfoy shivering on the floor.

He walked up to Malfoy who whimpered in fear and catching his left arm, pushed the robes up his arm and pressed the dark mark on his arm, thinking of the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle only. Not the new recruits or the children of the Inner and Outer Circle death eaters.

“Now tell me what happened.” He said softly and Malfoy struggled to get up and stand in front of his Lord to speak to him.

“Master they were hit by some spell by ancient magic.” Voldemort drew a sharp breath. Ancient magic! Who knew it? Most spells cast in their ancient language that was actually a chant of the Celts were not removable. Who knew it and how had they caught on to the horcruxes? He looked sharply at Malfoy, who continued shaking,

“Master, all the six of them was obliterated and the aurors had tried Severus’s potion, but nothing worked and after that Bones called for the unspeakables. They worked on them for almost two hours before they determined that the death eaters had been removed of their magic and death would approach them very painfully and it would be charitable to kill them. Fudge has since signed the Order my Lord.”

Voldemort glared at him malevolently as he started pacing thinking furiously.

In ten minutes all the death eaters of the fearful Inner Circle had assembled. Voldemort looked around and waited for another ten minutes and a figure came running. It was Rookwood.

Voldemort was waiting impatiently for Rookwood to take his place before he gave orders when an elf popped into the room. Voldemort was about to snarl at it when it spoke trembling, "Master Nagini is dead." Voldemort pointed his wand at it and blasted it off with so much power and rage behind his curse that the poor elf was burnt to a crisp in a minute.

Voldemort got up and went into the room where Nagini was kept and checked her thoroughly and found that she was indeed dead and the horcrux that was inside of her was also dead and he just could not extract it from her and he had tried very hard when she had become ill; had also died with her. Voldemort screamed in fury and all the death eaters who were in the main chamber shivered with fear.

Voldemort burnt her body in a fit of rage and bellowed for the elves to dispose off her remains and paced the floor not minding the stench that was still there. He was not aware when the shaking elves went away with the burnt remains of the huge snake and was not aware when a few minutes later the elves came back and cleaned the room of the horrible stench. He was pacing agitatedly around the room. In a space of a day he had lost two horcruxes.

What was happening here? No one apart from Lucius, Bellatrix, Rudolphus, Rookwood, Amyctus, Alecto and Rabastan knew about the horcruxes. He had not even told Snape, Arran, Avery and the others.

Now someone had come to know of not only about the existence of his horcruxes but also had the power to dismantle the wards and protections and his death eaters in charge of the horcrux. Rabastan was in a kissed state like a muggle, no worse than a muggle because he would not be able to live without his magic and he and the others were to be put down like rabid dogs.

His thoughts went to the other horcrux at Ravenclaw's castle and he stormed back inside. Amyctus was standing there and Voldemort breathed an invisible sigh of relief.

He looked around at all of them and asked the Inner Circle to remain and the others to form groups and prepare for attacks all over Britain today at night.

“Go to the library. Severus, remain here with us. I will need you as well.”

Severus who had been moving towards Avery and Nott to form a group came away.

“Sit down all of you.” He hissed in frustration and anger. All of them sat down and waited for a minute before the chamber cleared and the doors closed.

“Severus,” he hissed angrily, “I have today made you members of the Inner Circle giving you great power.” Snape stood up at once and went to bow to Voldemort and kissed the hem of his robes and thanked him profusely. “I will never let you down my Lord.”

“See that you do not do anything that might just take away that position.” The threat was apparent in his voice as he glared at Snape. Snape bowed his head and stood still in all humility. Taking away meant only one thing, a fate worse than death. Snape shuddered as he thought for a second of Regulus before he clamped down and steadied himself.

“Yes Master.” Was all he said looking down in a gesture showing extreme respect?

Bellatrix then looked around and for the first time noticed that Rabastan was not there. She frowned and nudged her husband and indicated the empty seat next to him. Voldemort was watching this by-play between husband and wife as if it would reveal something to him.

Rudolphus was not perturbed as Rabastan was guarding the horcrux. “Bella he is in charge of that thing. He cannot come here now.” Voldemort heard that and scowled. Bellatrix was frightened as she pointed out Amyctus who was very much in his place in the circle; and Rudolphus stared at him in shock.

He turned to look at Voldemort who glared at him in anger and still staring at him hissed to Lucius Malfoy, "Show us."

A big pensieve came into the room and Lucius Malfoy removed the memory and placed it into the basin. Voldemort hissed in Parseltongue and the memory started playing out. All the death eaters saw it and gaped, simply gaped.

"Amyctus, I hope for your sake the horcrux is right where I placed it." Voldemort said softly a sign he was ready to kill and kill indiscriminately.

Before he had vanished for thirteen years, Voldemort had not told anyone other than the Lestranges about horcruxes. Only Bella, Rudolphus, Rabastan and their parents knew. And even they did not know where he had concealed them. His parents were now very old and unable to attend meetings but they were his first death eaters and they had known and had in fact helped him to create the first ones.

But after Lucius without his knowledge had destroyed one and Regulus had already destroyed another Voldemort had decided to take his Inner Circle into confidence and had revealed to them about the existence of the remaining horcruxes so that if anything happened he would be resurrected with haste.

Now it looked that four of his horcruxes were already destroyed. Only two more were left and he dared not make some more as it would leave him even less of a human than he was now.

"I want all of us to go to the Castle of Ravenclaw and the island and check on the other two horcruxes and bring it back here with me until I can find a suitable hiding place for them. Come on." Snape stared for a second until Bellatrix hissed to him saying she would explain later and now would he move it. He moved it and soon all of them were gathered together.

Voldemort was watching Amyctus who was not worried as he conjured a long length of rope. Voldemort showed nothing on his face but was very relieved inside at the nonchalance of Amyctus.

They landed by the old oak tree and Voldemort felt the first stirrings of doubt. There was no magical activity. He looked around and found that all the death eaters were trying to feel the magical hum of the wards that were not there.

His face darkened as he flicked in rapid succession and his face slowly turned a pale white as he turned to Amyctus who was very bewildered and fired many spells at him. Voldemort could not discern anything. He strode to the tree and peered inside. There was nothing there and he turned and hissed very softly, "*Avada Kedavra.*" And Ameyctus died his eyes open in shock underneath his death eater mask.

"What is happening here?" he hissed whirled around to look at the others who were trembling with fear.

Voldemort did not wait for an answer as he conjured another rope and all the others silently held on to it and were transported to a small island in the Outer Hebrides. Bellatrix was sweating profusely as this was under her charge. There was a run down cottage on that small island and Voldemort flicked his wand and found the spells intact. He broke them and went and fetched the horcrux and came back and apparated.

The death eaters looked at each other before Bellatrix apparated first and that started the general exodus. All of them assembled once again at the main chambers and waited anxiously for Voldemort to come.

Five minutes later Voldemort strode in looking furious. "**Four horcruxes! Four!**" he shouted as all of them collectively winced and trembled.

"Rabastan worse than dead and Amycus has let the horcrux slip by him. I want to have some answers. **Now.** Who is the traitor here among the death eaters?"

All the death eaters collectively flinched. Traitor? They looked at each other, not that they could see through the masks but they really did not know what else to do. Anything could get them killed and losing

three horcruxes in the space of a night was a little too much to bear for a man who killed for fun and almost anything.

“Well it has to be a death eater who could walk through the dark barrier is it not?” he asked softly as the others gulped and realized the importance of what he was saying. “Well no matter I shall soon smoke them out just like I did with Peter and Regulus.” Voldemort’s face was glaring malevolently at everyone there. Suddenly he whirled towards Snape.

“Who has knowledge of the ancient magic Severus?” the last word came out as a hiss as Voldemort almost resorted to Parseltongue in his sheer fury.

“Master!” Snape trembled and Voldemort’s anger diminished just a little once he saw the fear he could induce in his followers.

“Does anyone in the Order know the ancient language of our lands and the magic it teaches?”

“No my Lord. I can find out today as the old fool has called for an Order meeting at lunch; it is probably to discuss about what happened in the morning. He has also asked all of us to patrol various places magical and muggle looking for disturbances as he seems to think we may attack this week.”

Voldemort scowled at that, he hated being predictable; so the old man thought he would attack would he? Well he was right and he would attack and today the world would know why they feared the great Lord Voldemort and why the Wizarding World shuddered to even speak his name. “Find out if they know of the horcruxes as well Severus and come and report to me whatever the time after Dumbledore finishes with you. You will not take part with us in the raids as I do not want any Order member to spot you.”

Snape bowed low and sat down again. Voldemort looked viciously at all of them. “Today we will attack random places indiscriminate of magic or muggle and show the world we are a force to be reckoned with. Call the others.”

Snape stood up and went to call the others who came scuttling in. Voldemort paced up and down still furious at the loss of his familiar and his horcruxes and started giving details of areas they should attack.

Around twenty places were chosen for attack, "Suggest other places to the old man Severus. Has he told you of specific places to guard?"

"No Master he has not. I presume he will today at lunch."

"Go now and come back and tell me the places they will be patrolling. Leave."

Snape left as he had a lot of work to do.

At the cottage in the morning

Snape had woken by two messages. One had been the Patronus from Dumbledore asking him to come over to Grimmauld Place for lunch leaving Harry behind at the cottage. The other message that woke him up to receive the Patronus in the first place was the burning of the dark mark.

He took an alertness potion and a pepper up potion and left a message to Harry informing him about his message from Dumbledore and that he was leaving to go to Voldemort as his mark was burning and calling him. He also called Arran through the ring and spoke to him and told him to be on the alert and Arran on his part told him that Draco had just informed him about Lucius Malfoy leaving the Manor early in the morning coming back and leaving once again.

Snape had left and attended the meeting and on a stroke of brilliance had told Voldemort that Dumbledore was expecting Voldemort to strike in the coming week and had asked them all to patrol from today onwards. Dumbledore had not told him any such thing but Snape had said that to Voldemort to be able to inform Dumbledore about the raids. This way if attacked Voldemort would not be able to suspect him.

Snape had to be very careful now especially as he was in the Inner Circle. He would be privy to so much information and passing on all that would definitely make Voldemort suspicious of him as until now such information had not leaked out and he was the spy after all.

Snape opened the door of the cottage to see Harry and Hermione studying together. They were reading from Canogahn's books and Harry jumped up as he saw Snape and rushed to him.

"What happened? McGonagall has not come as yet."

"She would be at Grimmauld Place Harry, and I have come from the Dark Lord who has chosen twenty places to attack today both magical and muggle." And he proceeded to explain all that had happened there.

Severus that's great," Harry was delighted at the attacks that had Snape and Hermione frowning for a second until they heard him out and then they were all smiles. "We could reduce Voldemort's supporters as much as we can today. What do you think?"

Snape looked at him for a long moment. "How did you escape Slytherin my boy? You are one through and through." And smiled very disturbingly wholly unconvinced as Harry huffed and puffed and insisted he was pure Gryffindor.

Harry activated his earring and spoke into it calling all of them at one go.

"Hey are all of you where you can talk?" he asked softly.

Arran, Ria, Draco, Pansy and Blaise replied in the affirmative while there was no answer except an hmmm from McGonagall, that meant she was with the others. The beauty of these earrings was that not only were they invisible but even if Harry shrieked into them no one other than those who were wearing it and whose names among those who were wearing it he had called. They had been charmed with ancient magic and were very powerful.

So Snape and Hermione were hearing Harry directly and not through the earrings as he had not called their names along with the

password, that was 'Slytherin Rules' in retaliation for saying Sirius's name when he had to use the ring to talk to Arran.

Though now Snape mostly used only the earring which Harry thought was not fair. But that was Snape and fair was a word not in his vocabulary when it came to Gryffindors Harry had thought rather sulkily when Snape had smirked and told him the password and refused to change it. Even McGonagall had tried but Snape had only smirked more. As it had some ancient magic woven into it McGonagall could not even tell him she would do the damn things.

Harry had been so impressed by the ancient magic that seemed so powerful that he had wanted to learn it and Snape and Arran had promised to teach him once he had advanced a bit in the dark arts and blood magic. Arran had also promised to teach him Black magic as that would help Harry not only to recognize it if it were cast but also remove it by knowing the counter spells as well.

But as that would come only later Harry was now studying the ancient magic from Canogahn's books. The magic was very simple though very powerful and it needed knowledge of the language of their forefathers and the chants for specifics as well. But the most important aspect was the ability to control one's magic to such an extent that one could with the ancient language almost cast anything and lock it into place.

As ancient magic recognized only the magical signature of the person who cast the spell or chant, it could never be removed by anyone else as there were no known counters unlike in the case of later spells. If ancient magic was to be removed by another person he would simply have to have the knowledge and power and strength of mind that was very much stronger than the caster who had originally cast the spells.

This was what Harry had understood and it excited him greatly. Only the most powerful could even think of casting spells and Harry thought that that alone said so much about Arran and Snape. Not even Dumbledore or Voldemort could do this. That made Harry even more determined to learn as this could be the power the Dark Lord knows not.

Arran, Draco, Blaise, Pansy and Ria came in almost at once. They had not been called today and Ria was looking very pale and her eyes were red as if she had been crying hard, which she probably had been as her father was now dead, Harry thought uncomfortably as he looked at her. He did not know if he should offer condolences as that would look hypocritical or as if he was making fun of her.

The other Slytherins and Arran too, looked a tad angry, helplessly angry as they did not even have the luxury of grieving, Harry realized belatedly. He looked at Ria who was being held very protectively by Draco, something there Harry thought as Ria leaned into him and smiled a little.

“Do not worry Harry. We made up our minds and were sure about what we wanted and Ria feels for her father not the death eater whom all of us have sworn to destroy. And do not forget it was I who obliterated him along with Severus and Ria agreed to send him to the Ministry to die as we all knew what the implications of such a spell would be.”

Ria also nodded her head sadly, “Yes Harry, you saw the way he spoke.” She trembled as Draco held her more protectively. “He had no remorse and he was not willing to listen to me and Arran and on top of that he was shouting that we his blood would be killed and destroyed. What kind of a living is that when you can wish for your closest blood to die a horrible death because we chose differently?” she turned away as tears broke her self control and poured down her cheeks.

“And what kind of a man is he whom we following who does not even want to acknowledge her father’s contribution and it had been a lot Potter. Spending thirteen years in Azkaban for the sake of the insane maniac and cursing his only daughter and nephew to die by Voldemort’s hands the moment he realized they had chosen a different path?” Draco asked furiously as he hugged her even closer as he shoulders shook and he led her to Harry’s bed and looked for a moment at Harry asking permission with his eyes. The moment Harry nodded he drew the curtains around them.

Snape had been watching all this silently until now came forward, "Arran I do not think Ria should be out today and nor should Hermione." as she started to protest he held up a hand as he continued, "No, hear me fully before you object. This time today I will not be with you and Arran will apparate the moment the Dark Lord calls him and that could be at any point tonight.

"You are not well versed in the Dark Arts Hermione and I was planning to put you, Pansy and Ria together. Now I feel Ria should be excused today, she has a lot on her mind; I wish you would agree to stay here with her. She would have guided you and helped you with the apparition had she come but now it is not safe. The killing curse will be thrown about all over the place and it is not wise, not this time, not today when the Dark Lord and his death eaters will be very vicious and eager for revenge."

Hermione nodded reluctantly. She knew a lot about the Dark Arts but it was not enough in return for the killing and the other equally terrible curses that would be thrown about carelessly by the death eaters in the night.

That decided Snape turned to Harry. "Harry, Draco, Pansy and you will be at two places; places that have the secondary death eaters and you will try and take them down," he paused here and looked at Harry deeply before continuing, "I want you to use as many dark curses as you can to make sure the death eaters will never harm anyone else ever again." He looked at Harry with hidden meaning in his eyes.

Harry gaped at him, "You meant try my best to kill them without actually using the *Avada Kedavra*? Oh Severus I couldn't." he said horrified.

"So you do think less of us; Severus and I because we killed, though in a different manner yesterday, the death eaters we had captures, is it not?" Arran asked him his expression unreadable.

Harry was taken aback and he did not answer at once. He thought for a while before he answered Arran who was watching him very intently as was Snape. Did he think less of Arran and Snape because they had killed? Harry knew he felt only admiration and affection for Snape

and he was fast developing the same for the man who not only looked like Sirius but who was also a lot like him in other ways as well.

Surprised and mildly shocked that he never thought less of Snape or indeed anyone in that room and he knew apart from Hermione all of them had done a lot terrible things. But he had never thought of them as killers or evil doers or even death eaters that they were in reality.

“No I never have though that of Severus not after I came here,” Harry added honestly. “And I have never thought that of any of you since I met you here at the cottage.”

“But all of us and that include Severus and even Draco and Pansy have killed Harry.” Arran said softly still watching him, not taking his eyes of Harry.

“Yeah, but you did not have a choice it was either you or them, Oh!” Harry’s eyes widened as Arran smiled and nodded his head.

“You have to look at it in this way Harry,” Snape told him softly, “You are not killing anyone, and all you are doing is making sure that those excuses for human beings will never harm any one magical or muggle just because they can cast the killing curse. They are bullies Harry and they want to rule the Wizarding World through terror and kill indiscriminately and also indulge in all kinds of orgies just because they can.”

“While yes to take the law into our hands and tackle the killers is wrong, to sit back and allow the Ministry to continue its laid-back approach to this war is equally wrong in my eyes.” Arran told him and Harry nodded his head as that was what the Order of the Phoenix also doing.

As if Snape knew exactly what he was thinking he said, “While yes that is what the Order is doing they don’t solve the problem Harry as they only defend when they are pressed. Otherwise they are happy to let it be. Dumbledore knows about horcruxes that was why he did not kill the Dark Lord in the Department of Mysteries, but what steps have been taken to remove them in the thirteen years the Dark Lord has been absent?”

“He could have done so many things,” Harry growled.

“But he didn’t.” Pansy answered. “He is responsible for so much, the way Slytherin is treated today, for allowing Voldemort to rise from the dead once again, for taking control of people who are not his to command, taking unilateral decisions and sacrificing anyone he thinks for the greater cause. What greater cause, his?” Pansy was scathing as she continued in the same vein.

“It must be for it certainly is not ours; Voldemort’s or even the Wizarding World’s. He sacrificed your parents, Black, the Longbottoms, Slytherin House, someone here and someone there, all for the greater good. Nothing good has really come out of that. On the other hand what we are doing *is* the greater good Harry. We have killed six persons yesterday but we have probably saved a hundred or more lives by that one act and I am not even talking about the horcruxes.”

“Breathe Parkinson breathe.” Hermione said smilingly and the mood was broken, though it gave Harry and Hermione a lot to think about.

Snape fell silent as he knew this was something Harry should work out on his own and soon Arran was talking to Pansy, Harry and Hermione about the Dark Arts waiting for Draco to come and joining them to plan out a strategy for the night.

End of Chapter – 16

Chapter – 17

At Hogwarts and later at the Order's Headquarters at Grimmauld Place in the morning

Dumbledore and Moody had gone to Hogwarts and from there Dumbledore had messaged everyone and had once again paced the floor to and fro, worried as he discussed the latest with Moody.

“Who can it be Alastor? Who knows the ancient magic of our forefathers so well that they were able to deploy it against the death eaters so efficiently? Who are they? For it has to be more than one and if this or these persons are coming into our fight Alastor, I do not like it.”

“What does it matter Albus?” Alastor’s voice was gruff. “Thanks to them today we are six death eaters short and one of them is Rabastan Lestrage. That alone shows that this is not a petty fight between the death eaters, but a war *against* them. Whoever it is should have our gratitude a they are fighting for us.”

“But who?” asked Dumbledore as he paced the floor sipping his hot spiced tea. “Who has the knowledge of the forgotten arts? We must know that and use them to our advantage.”

“I think you should simply sit tight on this one Albus. These persons are doing only too well and until they do something that warrants this agitation from you, I think we should be calm.”

Moody watched as his friend paced the floor trying to comprehend all that had happened. While it had baffled him as well, he was not perturbed as only death eaters had been apprehended and so what if they did die. The Wizarding World would be a better place for it.

But Dumbledore was not as easily satisfied as he really did not know anyone in the Wizarding World who knew the ancient arts, not him, not anyone in the Order and definitely not anyone among the death eaters as if they had Voldemort would have won the war long ago.

Not convinced, Dumbledore and Moody flood to Grimmauld Place to find the place bustling with people. The Weasleys were there and so were McGonagall, Remus, Tonks and Shacklebolt. And Kingsley and Tonks had apparently informed the others about what had happened at the Ministry early in the morning.

There were loud cries as Dumbledore stepped into the kitchen and smiling accepted a cup of tea from Molly Weasley.

“What happened Albus? Is what Tonks and Shacklebolt say true? I, for one was not able to find anything and I left after sometime.” Arthur Weasley who was already sipping a cup of tea asked him. He had also been there but had been unable to find anything. He knew an outline of what had happened from Tonks and Shacklebolt though.

Albus Dumbledore sighed and related everything he knew and asked all of them to keep an eye on anyone they knew who could tap into the ancient arts. McGonagall was listening with an amazed look on her face as she too queried Dumbledore about just who could have the power to cast such magic.

“I really do not know Minerva.” Dumbledore told her heavily. “Who ever it was we must be careful as they seem to have sprouted up all of a sudden and that is never good.”

As they sat there discussing Snape flood in sneering at one and all. “Severus! Were you called by Voldemort?” Dumbledore actually stood up as Snape walked in, wanting to know if Voldemort knew of this as Lucius Malfoy had been there.

Snape nodded as he refused a cup of tea from Molly.

“Apparently Lucius Malfoy was in the Ministry today morning and Rabastan Lestrage was as good as dead. The Dark Lord was livid and today he has ordered an attack all over the country both magical and muggle. When he told me not to reveal this to you, I told him that you had already called for an Order meeting and that you want all of us to patrol all over the country as the Dark Lord may try and enact revenge. He was angrier about that and wants all his death eaters to do maximum damage.”

Dumbledore beamed, "That was quick thinking Severus."

Snape inclined his head sharply, "Yes it was. You see, the Dark Lord has seen it fit to include me in his Inner Circle to replace Rabastan."

"Well that is one good thing that has come out of the capture." Dumbledore sighed in relief as this would mean that Snape would have more access to information that would do a world of good. In fact it had already started as Severus had come with not only valuable information, but had improvised so well that the Order could actually do something about it.

"The Dark Lord has asked me not to participate in the raids to day as that would raise suspicions and Albus I think it would be wise if I refrained from being seen with the Order as well."

Dumbledore nodded. "Yes you may go back to the cottage Severus, but be alert."

"How is Harry Severus?" Remus asked him softly, something no one else had asked, not even Molly, Snape noted bitterly as he sneered at Remus.

"He is as disobedient and disrespectful as ever. What else would you expect of Gryffindor's Golden Boy Lupin?" He remarked scathingly as he studied Remus. He seemed to have shriveled inside. Good, Snape thought with satisfaction. The bloody wolf deserved it for his cruel remarks about Harry. He must be thankful the dog wasn't there else, friend or not Black would have killed this man for isolating and ignoring Harry.

Remus snarled and then subsided guiltily as Snape raised an eyebrow, "Feeling very affectionate are we? Then why Lupin, did you not take boy with you? He must surely prefer your training to mine." Dumbledore clapped his hands to defuse the situation.

"Now, now let us concentrate on the matter at hand. Severus, please return to Voldemort and tell him that not only the Order but also the aurors will be patrolling everyday from now on. The war has truly begun. Alastor, please go to the Ministry and tell Amelia that our

spies have got intelligence that Voldemort will be attacking from tonight onwards. Harry is safe at the cottage is he not?"

Snape nodded his head and stood up to leave. "I will Patronus you if I have any more information on the Dark Lord."

"Oh and bring back Harry to the School with you when you come for the new School year and take care Severus. Be very careful." Dumbledore cautioned him and then Snape left.

The Ministry too, had on the information of Mad-Eye Moody acted promptly and that night there were many small but furious and deadly battles taking place at various places all through the night. Many flashes of light were reported from the muggles as an extraordinary phenomenon except those muggles who were involved in the muggle baiting and had only terror in their eyes until they died or were mercifully obliterated by the Ministry wizards.

Two aurors lost their lives in action against the death eaters and three more were seriously injured. About twenty muggles too, lost their lives, very few compared to the number that would have been lost if it weren't for Snape's actions.

The death eaters lost heavily as both Boot and Nott thanks to the dark curses thrown by Pansy, Harry and Draco who had fought four death eaters and had managed to kill the two who succumbed to their injuries infuriating Voldemort.

An invisible Snape had killed yet another death eater while a heavily disguised Arran had made sure that the four he had met head on would take a good while before they could be involved in active combat. While the Order had not managed to capture any death eater, the aurors managed to get three of them, two wizards and one witch from the outer ranks.

Voldemort did not attack after that night though he was raging at his recent losses and was reeling under them. He had lost more than ten death eaters in the last two days and three horcruxes and one familiar. He was now recuperating and would not try anything for at

least some time. He more than anything wanted to find out the identity of the man who had taken the horcruxes and had infiltrated into his hideout to kill Nagini.

Fortunately he came to a wrong decision that Peter Pettigrew must have given some Black magic potion to Nagini before he died, though it sat very uneasy on his mind. He kept brooding over the loss of horcruxes and his death eaters.

What was to be a night of terror for the muggles and the Ministry became a night of horror for Voldemort. He would be careful before he tried something like this again.

Harry, Draco and Pansy portkeyed back to the cottage exhausted and with many cuts and bruises and after healing them Ria, Draco and Pansy left for their homes and came back the next day with almost no information about all those who had died or suffered massive injuries. Their parents had been summoned and there was no news except bad news from the death eaters' point of view.

As that naturally meant good news from their side all of them were happy. McGonagall was yet to come as she was busy with the Order and the School that would begin in a few days. Harry, Draco and Pansy who had fought furiously with Nott Sr. and Boot Sr. and two other death eaters were waiting for news about them, as all three of them had managed to get a variety of dark curses at them, before they had portkeyed out of the village.

Harry was still in two minds about cursing to bring death and though he had cast dark curses the curses that killed came from Draco and Pansy. They did not tell Harry anything as this was something Harry had to work out on his own.

Snape did not come until evening as he had to attend an Inner Circle meeting and after that talk to Dumbledore and the Order and so it was nearly night before he came to give the news that the Boot and the Nott families had new Heads and he had killed a death eater who had an imperious on a muggle lady and was forcing her to rape her son.

Harry was horrified, "I hope they are all right Severus. What must she be feeling now and how will she be able to look at her son in the face after this. Good you killed him." He said viciously, feeling for the poor muggle, unconsciously deciding his thoughts on killing those who killed or hurt for fun or just because they could.

Snape smiled sadly at that, "No she will not remember and nor will he. I oblivated her and her small son, he would not have been more than six Harry, after I killed Tucson." He said maliciously as he thought of the death eater he had killed without any remorse whatsoever.

Harry and Hermione shuddered as Snape told the small boy's age. And to make his mother rape him, Harry gritted his teeth at the muggle baiting games that the death eaters indulged in.

"You are right Severus, you and Arran. It is not wrong to kill such horrible persons, persons who spoil families for fun." He said sadly.

Snape nodded briskly and then they turned their attention to other things as in three days time Harry and Snape would be leaving for Hogwarts. Hermione would meet Harry only on the first of September. Harry, Hermione and the others stopped work and for the next three days just lazed around and had fun.

Arran, Draco and the others were at the cottage almost full time not even going to their homes at night and McGonagall arranged for the girls to spend their nights with Hermione in her room. Their parents were furious and had suffered at Voldemort's hand about the losses they had suffered and it was safer to stay away from their homes.

They went to Diagon Alley and walked into Gringotts, all in various disguises and there Pansy, Blaise and Draco, opened new accounts and transferred some money into the personal vaults they opened, though not in their original names.

They took two secure pouches from Gringotts one to periodically remove money from their vaults and the other to send it to their new accounts. They spent the rest of the day lazing around the Alley and buying last minute stuff they needed.

The next day saw Harry packing with a long face as he had to leave for Hogwarts and for the first time since he started School, he did not wish to leave the cottage and the new friends and Hermione to go to his beloved School that until now was a home away from his home with the Dursleys.

They were all watching Harry pack flicking his wand here and there and were discussing as was usual these days the war that had already started. The Slytherins, Harry, Hermione and Arran and Ria had developed a friendship that had the capacity to deepen, a friendship that had developed after fighting together against death eaters and recovering horcruxes.

"You know we have to get at the root of our problems instead of just fighting against those who oppose us." Harry told them as he was shrinking his luggage, after applying various charms textbook by textbook to make it look different from the Dark Arts, Blood Magic he had with him and also disguised the books he had received from Canogahn.

"How so? And what problems Potter, if you mean the house elves," with a grin at Hermione who responded with an indignant glare, "They want to be enslaved. Pay them and treat them well is fine, that is personal, but don't say they should not be bound. You will be making a whole race unhappy."

Draco laughed out aloud as Hermione took a deep breath to launch into the defense of one of her pet projects. Before she could start and take the conversation away from the point Harry was trying to make, Harry hastily put up a hand and a pleading expression, "Wait Hermione," and turning to glare slightly at Draco who was still chuckling, "I was thinking about the after effects of the war once Voldemort is gone. I am assuming of course that he will be gone."

Draco sobered up at once as did the others who were until then smiling at the arguments that Hermione and Draco would have endlessly on elves. "It would be horrible Potter. Our population is at an all time low as you know and to rebuild a world that is on the brink of shattering completely is not going to be just difficult but near impossible."

“There are so few of us and out of all of us, still fewer come forward for formal education. Hogwarts is the only School in all of Britain and that should tell you just how many of us are literate.” Arran told him.

Harry was horrified and so was Hermione, surprisingly. “But Arran I thought those who did not come to Hogwarts were home schooled like you and Ria.” She protested as she thought of so many students who were not educated.

“Not persons like Stan Shaunpike Hermione,” Harry told her deep in thought, “and you know there is no wizarding university, I wonder how Bill, Bill Weasley you know,” he said looking at the others and added for Arran’s and Ria’s benefit, “Ron Weasley’s eldest brother Arran, I wonder how he became a curse breaker, I mean where did he study for it and who gave him the necessary certificate that said he was a good curse breaker.”

“Nothing, he probably studied a few texts and answered a few questions at his interview and got the job when the goblins decided he had a natural aptitude for it. That is all.” Draco told him.

Harry was stunned though Hermione was not surprised as she probably knew all about it. Then Snape came to Harry and sped up the packing process by packing almost everything else for him as he was standing by his trunk and pondering deeply.

“What happens to kids whose parents have died and have no other relations to be foisted on?” he asked Snape softly.

“They are put in muggle orphanages Harry, until they receive their letter. There is no wizarding orphanage. But usually it is the muggleborn children or those who are squibs that are shunned the former because they are magical and their muggle parents don’t want them, the latter because they don’t have magic and the magical parents are ashamed of them.” Snape told him packing and shrinking everything.

Harry was simply dumbfounded. But there was no time to discuss all this in length as it was time to go. Harry decided to research more on these subjects once he got to Hogwarts.

Then there were a flurry of goodbyes and a lot of 'be careful and don't do anything dumb' and hugs from Hermione, Pansy and Ria and Arran. Draco and Blaise patted him and then Harry was off with Snape to Hogwarts.

They portkeyed to Hogsmeade and from there walked briskly to the School and went to the Headmaster's office.

"Come in Severus, Harry." Albus called out softly.

Snape came in looking very relieved and Harry came in behind him looking equally relieved and happy that he was in Hogwarts.

"Here Albus, Potter is here. May I go now to at least enjoy three days of the summer now that *Potter* is here safe and sound?" he asked sarcastically receiving a glare from Harry and a smile from Albus.

"May I go to the Tower Professor?" Harry asked Dumbledore quietly.

Dumbledore nodded his head smiling, "Yes you may of course Harry. How have you been doing and are you now confident about your Occlumency skills?"

"Not really Sir. But yes better than I was before." Snape snarled at him and muttered something that sounded like 'no application of brains whatsoever' and earned a glare from Harry who had heard it as had Dumbledore who smiled at Harry, his eyes twinkling.

After he was dismissed, Snape had stayed back to discuss other matters with Dumbledore, Harry walked swiftly to Gryffindor tower and plonked his trunk by his bed and taking his wand started a systematic search of the entire room, starting with his bed. There was nothing by his bed or his desk that was by his bed, but at the extreme corner of the room showed a disturbance.

Harry slowly chanted non-verbally in the ancient magic he had memorized from Canogahn's books and had also verified with Snape and saw the spells that were there at that corner. There were about four spells, Harry knew all of them. A listening charm, a compulsion charm, a distraction charm and a loyalty charm.

To say Harry was mad was an understatement. He cast a silencing charm around him and spoke into his earring. "Sev call me as soon as you are alone and make sure that no one hears." He waited for a moment and Snape just said a soft hmm, just like McGonagall the other day and Harry cut that connection off and activated his earring once more.

Then Harry called Arran and all the others except Snape and spoke directly to Arran after saying hi to everyone. "Arran can I ask you something?"

"Of course Harry, Severus is fine is he not?" Arran's voice sounded worried.

"Yeah, he is with Dumbledore, that's why I called you guys."

"Oh," Arran sounded relieved, "What is it Harry?"

Harry told him what he had found and there were indignant cries and Hermione and Draco simultaneously wondered if they would find the same spells in their dorms.

"Harry search your common room as well, especially if you have a place where you sit all the time." Draco told him.

"Yeah, I was going to, but you see I need some thing to make these spells ineffective and at the same time make sure Dumbledore does not find out. Is there something like that in the Dark Arts? I don't want you to tell me to do it by ancient magic Arran as then Dumbledore would know in a jiffy that all this ancient magic is connected to me."

There was a pause as Arran tried to think if he could find a way out of it without the Headmaster's knowledge. He could not come up with anything that he could hide from Dumbledore.

"Harry anything you do will be detected by Dumbledore. So be careful and don't say anything that could give you away and if you want to speak to us or to Hermione once School starts make sure you place a silencing charm before you speak. I will try and think of something that you can do in the meantime and I will speak to Severus as well."

"Be careful Harry." Came a chorus of voices after that and Harry turned off the connection and started unpacking. He soon finished and went down meaning to go to the library, but on a sudden thought went up to the dorm again and armed with a lot of parchment went up to the seventh floor to the Room of Requirement and walked swiftly three times, thinking intently.

Soon a door appeared and Harry walked in to find a table with a chair set in the middle and book shelves all around. He placed his parchment, ink and quill on the table and walked around the shelves. There were books on squibs and their position today, orphans, wizarding studies and how one could become the most accomplished in any magical subject, books to find your aptitude, Ministry rules and regulations regarding orphans and last of all ancient magic.

Harry went to work. He first set charms that would tell him if anyone came into the corridor and he requested the Room to change all the books to his sixth year curriculum if anyone did. He included witches, wizards, elves and anyone in short.

Then Harry started looking through the shelves and taking down books. Soon he was immersed in his studies. Once and only once did the Room change the books and Harry stretching at the moment the Room changed the books saw quite clearly the aura of his Headmaster.

Dumbledore ambled into the room and as Harry bent down frowning to seemingly check something, he peered at the books on the shelves and went away satisfied. Harry was not disturbed after that.

The next three days went in the same fashion. At dinner the first day Harry walked in a little late. He rushed into the Great Hall to find all the others seated and about to begin.

Snape glowered at him and McGonagall glared at Snape and smiled at Harry. Both of them had warned Harry not to go near the charms as Dumbledore was Headmaster here and he was in control and he would know the second Harry tried anything. So Harry had let that place alone and anyway until Ron came Harry would not be talking to anyone in the dorm.

He had also scanned the common room but was relieved when there were no spells there. "Albus would have gone mad with the noise and the chatter that he would be privy to had he tried that." Snape had snorted and that was that.

Now Harry came and awkwardly sat down among his Professors and his Headmaster. Albus smiled kindly at him, "Why Harry, you seem busy already. Where have you been?"

"To the Room of Requirement Sir. I thought I would try and get a head start on Hermione this year. I am going to study well in all my subjects." Dumbledore nodded his head approvingly as did McGonagall but Snape had predictably snorted. "That would be the day." He muttered as he ate.

Harry was about to say something very rude and land himself in a lot of trouble when Dumbledore intervened, "Now Severus, I think that is the right attitude. Keep it up my boy." He said beaming at Harry and then Harry was left to himself.

He ate and he kept a watch on everyone and tried to notice everything. He also amused himself by seeing their auras and telling himself about what they could mean.

As soon as dinner was over Harry excused himself and went back to the Room of Requirement and started working again after casting pretty much the same spells. He spent the rest of his time until the school carriages arrived, reading and taking copious notes of anything that he felt important except ancient magic.

That one subject Harry studied right there. He started with the very basics and went very slowly.

He finished his studies in all other subjects of interest by then and had a fair idea of how things worked. Harry walked out of the Room of Requirement and went to his dorm and put the papers in his trunk and locked it and went down, mask firmly in place.

The School carriages had not yet arrived and since he had been studying hard, he had not spoken much to the others and he had not spoken all day with Hermione, Draco, Blaise and Pansy once they

had arrived at King's Cross. So Harry was waiting and watching with interest.

The Staff were already at their table talking softly with each other. Dumbledore and McGonagall smiled at him and Hagrid waved and Snape scowled. Harry smiled at that and waved back at Hagrid even as Snape and McGonagall started arguing about something.

Harry turned as the sound of the carriages reached him and waited with so many feelings swirling in him. Wishing him self luck, Harry went to the Gryffindor table and sat at his usual place. The students started coming in and Harry smiled or waved if they did and ignored it if they scowled as the Slytherins did.

He watched Terry Boot who was looking pale and very disturbed as was Nott. Boot had not looked at Harry but Nott had and had snarled at him on principle, had he known that his father had died because of fighting with Harry, Draco and Pansy he might have done a lot more. Now he was restrained by Millicent Bulstrode who whispered something placatory in his ears.

Draco, Pansy and Blaise followed by Crabbe and Goyle walked imperiously to the Slytherin table whispering among themselves and glaring around at everyone else.

Then Harry's attention was diverted by the arrival of Ron and Hermione followed by Neville, Seamus, Dean and Ginny.

All of them greeted him loudly and, "Hey mate, why didn't you come on the train?"

Harry hugged Hermione after he slapped Ron on his shoulders and also grinned at Neville, Dean and Seamus.

"Hey guys, hi Ron, hi Hermione, Dumbledore told me to come along with Snape three days before and here I am. The School was so quiet before all of you came I was going nuts. Now it will be fine."

Ron grinned back at him and so did Neville and the others.

“Harry have you finished your homework that Snape set you?” Hermione asked him and when he nodded she turned to Ron who laughed and put up his hands in surrender.

“Hermione I am not taking potions this year. Didn’t get the required grades.”

“Hey Harry. How have you been?” asked a soft voice beside him and Harry turned to see Ginny standing there smiling at him.

“Hi Ginny. I am fine and you? This is your OWL year isn’t it?” and only waited for her to smile and nod before he turned to Ron and asked him about his scores and soon all of them were chatting away about their Owl grades. Harry sensed rather than saw Ginny’s frown as she went to sit with her friends.

“I am going to specialize in Herbology.” Neville told him shyly.

“Great Neville. You will be the best. You have such green thumbs, both of them. Did your gran scold you about the wand?” Harry asked him awkwardly hoping Neville had not got into much trouble for breaking his father’s wand.

Neville grinned as he brought out his new wand and held it up proudly. “My gran was so pleased that I had fought the death eaters alongside with you. She said it was what my dad would have done and by fighting the death eaters I made them proud.” His eyes shone with pride as he looked at Harry who smiled happily at him.

“Yes, Neville your dad and your mum would have been so proud of you.” He said softly making Neville blush in happiness.

At that moment Dumbledore clapped his hands for silence and soon the sorting hat was brought into the Great Hall and after its customary song that once again stressed on unity among the four Houses if the Wizarding World would want for any kind of progress against the evil that was coming closer and closer.

The sorting started with McGonagall reading the names of each student and when the last had been sorted into Slytherin, the feast began and Harry and the others listened desultorily to Dumbledore’s

warning not to enter the Forbidden Forest and Flich's ban against the Weasley Wizarding Wheezes.

Then still chattering loudly and happily Harry and the others walked up to Gryffindor Tower and went to sleep. Harry slept like a log, happy and satisfied. He had said a quick hello to Snape, Hermione, McGonagall, Draco, Pansy, Blaise, Arran and Ria once he had got into bed. He drew the curtains around him and had placed a silencing charm on them. After chatting for sometime, Harry said his goodnights to everyone from Snape and Hermione to Draco and Arran, Harry went to sleep.

End of Chapter – 17

Chapter – 18

The next morning Harry woke up feeling not only fresh but very good. He was very happy though he really did not know why. He thought of Hermione and blushed as he felt odd sensations sweeping through him, making his body react in certain ways that made him blush even more. He had dreamt of her and he realized with a loopy grin, that was why he had woken up so happy.

He opened his trunk to take his clothes out and went almost whistling to the bathroom. He came out all refreshed and woke up Ron and as Ron grinned at him and sleepily went of to have his bath, Harry started taking out his books and packed them into the new bottomless bag he had bought from Diagon Alley before.

He added one of Canogahn's books on ancient magic feeling that he would be able to understand them better as he had been through the basics in the Room of Requirement for the last three days. He also added a Dark Arts book and a book on Blood Magic and he was ready. He activated his earring and spoke softly into it, casting silencing charms and notice me not charms on the curtains.

"Hey Hermione are you awake?" he asked softly, keeping an eye on the bathroom by the simple process of making the curtains see-through.

"Morning Harry yes, I am awake and was almost ready to go down. I will meet you there." Hermione said just as softly.

Harry then called for Snape, "Hi Sev, and 'morning."

"Harry have you placed silencing charms on your curtains?"

Harry laughed, "Yeah."

"Be careful brat and I will not give you a detention today, you have the last class and we will try and talk after that. Tell Hermione and I will tell Draco and the rest to come then."

“No need Severus.” A chorus of voices interrupted and laughing Harry cut the connection as he saw Ron coming out of the bathroom.

Harry hastily bent down and shut and locked his trunk and opened his curtains and grinned at Ron. Ron grinned back at Harry until he saw the bag and a look of jealousy came over him, before he wiped it off his face.

Why should he feel so jealous Harry wondered? He is richer by ten thousand galleons this year after all he thought a bit bitterly and suddenly it struck him that Ron was so good at hiding his feelings that had Harry not known about Ron, he would have never noticed the jealousy or anything else really. Maybe he learnt Occlumency from Dumbledore Harry thought angrily for a second.

The next second Harry swallowed his anger and gazed at Ron smiling at him and grinning at him as Ron patted his stomach, “Come on Harry, time for breakfast, I am hungry.” And Ron pulled Harry out of the room. As they were passing Neville, Harry on an impulse shouted to Neville who was also closing his trunk, “Hey Neville coming?”

Harry felt very guilty at the way Neville beamed at him at that simple invitation and nodded, “In a jiff, Harry. Let me close my trunk.” Once again Ron’s face turned ugly before he grinned good naturedly at Harry. Only his eyes were very hard.

Linking his hands through Neville’s Harry and Ron walked down Seamus and Dean just behind them and met Hermione in the common room tapping her foot impatiently. She looked up and was about to say something sharp, when she noticed Harry was looping his hands through Neville’s and her eyes softened.

“Harry, Ron, Neville, come on it’s the first day of classes and we must not be late.”

“Hi Hermione,” Harry and Neville chorused and Ron looked at her desire shining in his eyes as he merely grinned. Hermione saw it and frowned inwardly and glanced at Harry, but thankfully he had not noticed it.

All of them trooped down to the Great Hall and sat down talking hard about the subjects they had chosen.

“Well I am going to take charms, Transfiguration, defense against the dark arts, potions and runes.” Harry told all of them.

Ron’s jaw hit the floor at the mention of runes and he was going to say something when Hermione stepped in, “Good Harry, you are finally choosing good subjects instead of things like divination and the like. You Ron and Nev, what are you taking?”

“Well Herbology, defense, charms and Transfiguration. No potions.” Neville said with a shudder as he thought of potions and Snape.

“Well I am taking the same as you Harry, except potions, and I am also taking care of magical creatures.” Ron told him and then asked him, “Why runes Harry?”

“I read an interesting book that I got from Flourish and Blotts this summer and it was fascinating Ron, why don’t you try it along with me. I am planning to write my OWLS in runes this year. If I pass, I will take my NEWTS next year.”

“Don’t worry Harry I will teach you. It will be easy especially if you will work hard. In fact Ron you and even you Neville should do this as this will help in understanding spells in DADA better.” Hermione told him smiling at him.

Neville looked thoughtful; “I will write my Gran and if she allows will you help me as well?” he asked looking at Hermione shyly.

Hermione nodded, “Of course I will Neville.”

“Give your name for it to McGonagall today before she draws your schedule and you can always withdraw if your gran does not allow.” Harry advised him and Neville trotted off to McGonagall to tell her that he would be taking runes that year.

Harry turned to tackle Ron about it who agreed very reluctantly trying his best to dissuade Harry from taking a new subject, “Aw come on

Harry, why do you have to take on a new subject this year, I thought we could relax this year.”

Harry nodded his head, “Yeah we will Ron, but I badly want to try this. Come on this will be helpful in our defense class.”

Ron scowled and grunted but did not say anything more and went off to McGonagall.

Neville was already there and she looked at Ron, “Mr. Weasley, have you also come for the same purpose as Mr. Longbottom, to enroll in runes?”

Ron nodded. “Yes professor.”

“Well,” she said briskly “You may but make sure you get not less than an acceptable in your assignments for the next three months or else you will have to leave the class.”

Ron brightened as he heard that and nodded his head and went away with Neville carrying his new schedule. McGonagall came behind him and handed out the schedules for the others.

Ron grimaced and glanced at his schedules and found to his dismay that there was hardly any free time. He pulled Harry’s schedule and saw that Harry had even less time.

“Okay now, I think all of us should go to our classes, I have Transfiguration,” and she peeped into Harry’s and saw that he had it too, “You have it too; now we will meet in the library in the evening after dinner and we can start straight away on runes. I will give you my book Neville until your gran okay’s it for you. Ron you will write your mother and ask her to send the books to you won’t you?” she finished and started walking towards the doors.

Ron sulked all the way to the Transfiguration classroom and sat there scowling all through the class. Harry and Hermione did not mind though. Hermione sat with Neville and Harry and Ron sat together.

McGonagall was starting with human Transfigurations and soon all of them were listening attentively to her explanations. It all seemed very

complicated and Harry groaned along with Ron and indeed the others when she set an assignment for them.

The same was repeated in all classes and then Ron finally had the last period free. Harry and Hermione had potions for their last class. Harry and Hermione went to the potions class and found that they were the only Gryffindors, Draco, Blaise, Pansy and Bulstrode from the Slytherins, Padma Patil and Terry Boot from Ravenclaw and Justin Finch-Finchley and Michael Corner from Hufflepuff.

“Now, not all of you who are here are here because you are well versed in the art of potion making.” Snape started speaking softly staring straight at Harry and waited for the Slytherins to snicker and then continued, “However if anyone, anyone and I do not care for titles or names, will fall below the standards set by me, then you will be removed from my class for good.”

He looked around and sneered at everyone and then looking straight at Harry, “Is that clear?” he asked his voice suddenly sharp and like a whiplash.

Harry was about to pair with Hermione when Snape clapped his hands, “I will decide the pairing for the rest of the year. Malfoy sit with Granger. Boot with Bulstrode. Patil with Finchley. Potter with Parkinson and Zabini with Corner.”

“Begin.”

Harry scowled at Snape and went to sit with Pansy winking at her as he sat next to her. Draco sat away from Hermione looking as if he just managed not to hold his nose. Pansy was being less subtle, “Potter, don’t sit too close to me for Merlin’s sake.”

“As if I want to,” Harry mumbled as he winked at her again. She scowled at him. He could keep winking at her because no one could see and she could not do the same. She ‘accidentally’ nudged him and then smirked at him telling him to get the ingredients. Harry turned once more and smiled at her making her flush in anger before leaving to get the ingredients.

They were doing a complex potion and soon all of them went to work. The whole class worked silently and efficiently because of the man prowling around glaring at them and their cauldrons.

When Harry and Pansy went up to Snape's table to hand over the potion, he smirked at Harry and said, "Five points to Slytherin for making sure Potter did not spoil the potion." And smiled as Harry spluttered and then sighing in defeat, with his eyes promising retribution later on he turned and stomped out angrily.

As they tiredly went to their common room, they realized that they had homework assignments in almost all subjects and Harry had a mountain of work in runes and he had not had even a single minute to study the books he had taken out in the morning. The first day was not even over.

Harry trudged up to his dorm and dumping his bag on his bed, went to freshen up and came out feeling more alert. Neville, Dean and Seamus were there but no Ron. Harry smiled at the others and chatted a bit with them and then he and Neville went down to go to the Great Hall for dinner, before tackling all their work.

As they were leaving Ron and Ginny came running through the portrait hole and stopped as they saw Harry. Ron flushed for a second before he controlled himself and grinned, "You go on Harry; I will just come along after you. Need to freshen up." And Ron ran up.

Ginny smiled at everyone and Harry and the others grinned back at her and went on their way. Harry was thinking furiously though. Ron and Ginny had come running together and Ron had not said where he had been. Well he could not could he, especially if he had been to the Headmaster's office? Harry heard a sarcastic voice inside of his head that sounded suspiciously like Snape.

Yeah they could not he answered his own query, how could they when they probably went to Dumbledore to report on today's activities. Harry's face turned ugly for a second and he hastily rearranged it as Hermione nudged him. She had been looking worried and angry and had been watching him from the corner of her eyes and seeing his expression had warned him.

They walked talking and laughing as they made their way to their table and Harry plunged in. He was ravenous and he wanted to finish dinner and his studies fast and meet with Snape and the others and let his hair down. Ron joined them soon after and they laughed and chatted all through dinner, only Harry's laughter was slightly strained.

Harry and the others went straight to the library not listening to Ron's protests about relaxing as it was only the first day after all and soon Harry, Hermione, Neville and Ron were sitting in a remote corner.

Harry pulled out his assignments and started with Transfiguration, helping Neville along the way. They also practiced wand movements and soon they had finished with it. Neville's new wand was working so very well for him that Harry felt compelled to comment upon it.

"Your new wand is doing wonders for you Neville. I think this suits you far more than your dad's old wand." He said as he watched Neville flick it.

Neville nodded, "Yes Harry, though that was my dad's wand it did not work well for me. How difficult it was with that wand, I realize only now when every spell seems to come so easy from this."

Harry having a sudden suspicion used his aura sight and saw Neville's aura. It was a combination of pink and green with small silver dots sprinkled here and there. Harry put that away in his mind to ponder on it later. He then turned curiously to Ron and saw a combination of red, blue and pink and purple and all the colors were the same as was in almost all the auras he had seen but very sluggish.

Ron at this point was so bored by Hermione's lectures and was not really listening to her explanations about Transfiguration or Charms. Instead he was watching Harry and Neville practice wand movements tackle their Transfiguration homework together before they started on their Charms.

Soon they had their Charms work all done and Hermione had left Ron to his own devices, concentrating on her work. By common consent they decided to do the potions homework the next day. Ron had finished Transfiguration but had not even started with Charms. Harry

and the others packed their bags except for their Runes books and Hermione took Harry, Ron and Neville through the basics for the next hour.

Ron was yawning within the first ten minutes, though Harry and Neville were listening attentively. Harry knew most of what Hermione was saying and soon they were tackling their first assignment in Runes.

A half hour later the three boys and one girl packed their bags tiredly and went up to their common room. They still had their potions assignment and the first day was not even over and it was not even the NEWTS year.

There was no one in the common room and Hermione went to the girls' dorm saying a brief goodnight to the other three boys, who mumbled back and went to their dorm and automatically washed up and crashed on to their beds.

Harry had the curtains spelled and then called Snape.

"Severus?" he called out softly.

"Harry? I am waiting here for you. Draco and the others were not able to come. What happened?"

"I was not able to shake off Ron. Severus, he and Ginny came running as we were leaving for dinner and simply stood before us for a second before telling us he would join us as soon as he would wash and freshen up and simply ran up the stairs. I am sure he was with Dumbledore as was Ginny." Then realizing that Snape had said Draco and the others were not able to come down Harry tensed slightly.

"What happened to Draco and the others? Why did they not come down? Is there a problem Severus?"

"No," Snape told him making him feel very relieved, "They too could not get away. Harry I think that we should keep to speaking like this until we get a chance to meet. Read up your books and keep up with your other studies as much as you can, all right?"

“How could you take points off me Sev? That was so unfair.” Harry demanded and huffed a little as Snape laughed, “But my dear Harry I have to keep up my dislike of you have I not and,” Snape paused here for a second before he continued, “I really enjoy taking points off Gryffindor, you must know by now.” and laughed as Harry spluttered loudly at the unfairness of it all.

After that they spoke quietly for sometime before Harry deactivated his earring and took out his book on ancient magic and started reading for almost an hour before he could not stop yawning and went to sleep.

That set the tone for the next few weeks. Harry, Hermione and Neville and slowly Luna who joined them, spent their time studying very hard on all their subjects. Ron was also always with them but he was not studying as well and spent his time in trying to distract Harry all the time.

“Ron, I have spent enough time fooling around and it was because of that I lost *him*. I did not know enough to counter the death eaters. I am going to study as hard as I can so that those mistakes will never be repeated. Understood?” Harry told him warning in his tone about a week into School. Ron had been badgering him to slow down and Harry was almost at the end of his patience.

Ron had glared at Harry and when Harry refused to back off he had stormed away. However he had cooled down sufficiently, and came around the next day talking and laughing as usual. Harry suspected bitterly that Dumbledore had reminded him of the money he had paid into Ron’s separate account and had forced him to be with Harry.

Two weeks before Halloween came the first Hogsmeade weekend and that morning which was a Saturday and was a clear, crisp and cold day. Harry, Ron and Neville, who became a part of their group, now came down the stairs to find Hermione waiting for them. Just as they were to leave for Hogsmeade, Ginny came running down and screeched to a halt in front of Harry.

“Harry, may I join you all as well?” she asked smiling brightly at Harry and looking expectantly at him.

Harry blinked and looked at Ginny who was smiling at him in a way that made him feel very uncomfortable.

“Er, Ginny don’t you think you have to ask Ron that?” Harry asked her not smiling back at her. She scowled at him for a second and then smiled turning to Ron and raising her eyebrows.

Ron shrugged uncomfortably as Luna bounced into the room, “Are we all going to Hogsmeade Harry?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded his head and he and the others moved away from Ron and Ginny who were still staring at each other.

“Come on Ron,” Harry called out to him, “We will be slowly moving on.”

As the portrait door shut Harry had a glimpse of an angry Ginny who was speaking rapidly in a low voice and a very uncomfortable looking Ron.

Harry and the others walked away from the Tower and went out of Hogwarts to the fully magical village of Hogsmeade. They walked into The Three Broomsticks and grabbed a table at the back and had a very enjoyable time there until they were joined by both Ginny and Ron who ran in looking all flushed and angry. Ron stopped as he saw Harry and with effort pulled his face back to normal. Ginny however was smiling as he dragged a chair and sat next to Harry.

There was an uncomfortable silence the easy conversation coming to a full stop as the brother and sister sat down with them.

Ginny looked around and still smiling though now her smile was a bit strained, opened her mouth to say something to Harry, the doors opened once again and the Slytherins walked in. Draco, Blaise, Pansy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle and Bulstrode came in chattering happily, stopped when they saw Harry and the others sitting there.

“Hey look at that Draco,” Pansy told him, “The Golden boy, his harem and the sidekicks. What a pretty picture.”

“Hey shut up.” Ron told them his wand at the ready. Harry also had his wand in his hand as did the others.

Draco sneered at Weasley. “Why should we? You are the sidekick as is the squib. How much are you paid for all this?” he asked conversationally as Ron’s face flamed as did Ginny’s.

Harry and Hermione glanced at Ron and Ginny whose faces were red and Ron’s was slowly becoming purple. Millicent Bulstrode took up where Draco had left off, “They must be paid lots Draco. After all the Potters are old family aren’t they? Potter may lack in just about everything but he has got the gold. Otherwise the Weasels will surely not associate with him, for Merlin’s sake.”

“Maybe you hire them by the year hmm Potter?” Nott added smirking, unknowingly hitting the nail right on the head, when Ron who had now become as pale as had Ginny, while the others were looking silently at this attack. Then all was a blur as Ron and surprisingly Ginny launched themselves on Draco and the others. Harry and Neville jumped and tried to pull Ron away while Hermione and Luna were doing the same for Ginny.

Ron was punching Malfoy for all that he was worth and Ginny had removed her wand and was cursing indiscriminately at one and all. Malfoy and the others were giving back as good as they got though Draco, Pansy and Blaise took care not to hit Harry, Hermione, Neville and Luna, the other Slytherins were not so kind.

Nott seeing this opportunity, something Harry and the others should have anticipated sent out a dark curse that hit Harry straight on his chest. The next second Harry crumpled on to the ground.

Then there was more pandemonium as Hermione shrieked loudly when Harry fell down and she, Neville and Luna dragged Harry to the side. Thankfully Hermione had taken the precaution of casting a powerful shield that bounced off about six curses and very dark by the looks of it. Many other students who were there had joined the fight and soon there was a free for all going on with hexes and jinxes flying everywhere.

Neville was about to run to bring someone as Harry was now shivering and there was a trickle of blood that had started coming down from his mouth and nose, when the door opened with a bang!

"Silence! What is happening here?" Snape was standing there with McGonagall and both of them had their wands in their hands as they surveyed the scene in front of them.

"Here professor," Hermione was sobbing as she held Harry and McGonagall rushed at once to her and ran her wand through Harry and her lips tightened as the spell showed the use of a dark curse.

Snape stood still his heart almost stopping as he saw Harry slumped over unconscious and swiftly striding up to him, he turned to the Slytherins he asked them in his coldest voice, "Wait here all of you."

He ran his wand over Harry and his lips tightened as he looked at the nervous crowd and snapped, "Who cast the *seeping curse* at Potter?" There was a collective gasp at those words and McGonagall gave a sort of a stifled scream as she heard that and quickly got to work.

"Sir we saw Potter and his friends here and there was an argument and I really don't know how Potter got hurt." Draco's eyes showed his worry.

McGonagall by then had conjured a stretcher and had placed Harry on it freezing him with a stasis charm and was on her way out, with Hermione, Luna and Neville following her. Ron and Ginny saw that and started to leave when Snape stopped all of them.

"Granger, were you, Lovegood and Longbottom in the fight?" Snape glared at her as he asked her.

"No Sir, Harry and Neville were holding Ron, and Luna and I were holding Ginny who were angry with Bulstrode and Nott and the others for, for, for," she ran down there, her eyes still running with tears and looking at the door longingly.

"You may go with professor McGonagall and help her if necessary." Hermione waited only for that, she was out like a shot racing after McGonagall.

Ron and Ginny scowled and tried to also move to the door when Snape raised his eyebrows, "And pray, may I know where you two are going?"

"To Harry. He is my best friend and I want to be with him you greasy git, don't you understand, let me go." Ron shouted as he totally lost control and it was the sudden quiet in The Three Broomsticks that reminded him that he had said something that would land him in a lot of trouble and be very hard to get out of.

"What did you say Weasley?" Snape asked very softly, his eyes piercing Ron Weasley.

No one dared utter a word as they stood still and silent.

Snape suddenly whirled to Neville and Luna, "Longbottom, what happened here? Tell me word for word; else you will be in detention with me all the year around."

Neville gulped as Snape's eyes landed on him and stumbling and stuttering with Luna helping him along, Snape soon got to the bottom of what had happened.

"Draco, Bulstrode, Nott, Zabini and Parkinson, to my office and wait there for me. Weasley, you and your sister will join them in my office and wait for me. Now I expect all of you to behave yourselves and there will be no talking let alone fighting. I will know if any of you do anything to the contrary."

"Hey let me and Ginny go. We did not do a thing. It was your slimy Slytherins." Ron shouted at Snape, who had already turned to leave for Hogwarts. Hearing Ron's words he stopped and turned around. "You will do as I say, both of you. Is that understood?" his eyes bore down on Ginny and Ron.

But Ron and Ginny were very flustered by the words that Draco and the others had thrown about and both of them lost it completely.

"No we won't and you cannot make us, you death eater." He shouted as Ginny tried to pull him back. Snape came forward and stood intimidating in front of Ron and glared into his eyes.

“If I were a death eater you would not be alive now for provoking me so.” He said very softly, his tone deadly and promising retribution.

There was a deathly silence as Snape stood there for a long minute until Ron started shaking and sweating and then he turned and walked out swiftly and almost ran along the road to Hogwarts and once he was out of sight from The Three Broomsticks he apparated to the gates and ran inside and once he entered the doors at Hogwarts, went straight to the infirmary, summoning a few potions on the way.

He burst into the infirmary where he was greeted with many cries of relief from, McGonagall, Pomfrey and Hermione. Snape opened the bottles he had summoned to him and McGonagall conjured vials and soon they had poured about four potions into Harry’s throat.

Harry was unconscious through it all and a few minutes after he had the last potion, the blood that had been coming out of his nose and mouth stopped. Snape ran his wand once again as did Pomfrey and they found that the internal bleeding was slowly being contained.

“This would need three more potions that I have to make as I do not have it with me. Potter will have to sleep with a stasis charm until then, I’m afraid. He has been hit by a seeping curse that is a dark curse used to seep the blood in two ways from the body. The blood flows out through the nose and mouth and it also starts seeping out of the blood vessels inside the body.”

“Severus?” McGonagall trembled as she looked at his in horror as Hermione gasped out loudly and Pomfrey looked grim.

“Who did this Severus?” she demanded her face boding no good for whoever dared to use a dark curse on a student and that too, Harry for whom she had a soft corner.

Snape told her briefly, “Minerva will fill you on the rest Poppy. I need to go to the potions lab to brew the necessary potions Poppy. The potions I have given are only to temporarily stop the flow of blood outside and inside. Granger I will need you and Roger from seventh year and,” looking at Luna and Neville who had entered the infirmary at that point Snape continued, “Lovegood you may come and help

Granger with the chopping. You will inform Albus Minerva, I presume.” Snape told her as he went down to the dungeons followed by Luna and Hermione who was still crying.

All of them went to the dungeons and Snape asked an elf to call for the seventh year student whom he knew was not associated with death eaters and gave Hermione and Luna instructions and bade them to start work. Then he left for his office to meet with the Slytherins.

Snape strode in silently and stood in a dark corner of the office watching everyone who was there. All of them were standing very uncomfortably Snape noted with satisfaction, though Draco, Pansy and Blaise were looking worried.

He strode into the room and everyone looked up with a start as he came and sat down on the chair and surveyed them intently. All of them shuffled a bit and looked down. They were all much disheveled and sported various scratches and wounds on their person.

“Well this is out of my hands as the Headmaster will mete out your punishments. How stupid can you be, all of you who are from Slytherin I mean? Do you or do you not know that fighting outside where there are so many witnesses are just not done?” the tone was soft and silky and all the Slytherins shivered. That tone meant a very harsh punishment later.

At that point Dumbledore entered and looked very gravely at all of them and his blue eyes pierced Ron and Ginny intently making them squirm. Snape got up at once and they went to a corner of the room and spoke for sometime, Snape looking very sour.

They heard him say to Dumbledore as they walked back to the students, “But Albus Potter will survive. Must you be harsh when nothing has really happened?”

“I knew it. You are a death eater.” Ron shouted. He was frustrated, nothing was going his way and now it looked as if he was going to be punished badly.

Snape sneered at him and Dumbledore took over. "What you have committed today is a grave offence indeed. Please hand over your wands."

Ron came first and handed his wand for the *priori incantatem*. Slowly all the others came forward and when Nott came trembling Dumbledore silently tested his wand and found the curse had come from his wand.

He looked at Nott silently for a few minutes his eyes assessing the situation that was at hand.

"Mr. Nott, this offence if reported by Mr. Potter will get you life in Azkaban if you are fortunate and a dementor's kiss if you are not. What do you have to say about this?"

"He wishes to apologize of course, Headmaster. These curses come not by intent but in the heat of the moment. He will be punished of course but surely all of them are young boys and they do get carried away." Snape glared at Nott willing him to back Snape's statement and Nott who was very frightened by now nodded his head fervently.

"Yes Sir. I never meant to. I never knew what this curse would do. I just happened to read of it somewhere and..." Nott gulped and looked pleadingly at Snape.

He was not to know that Snape was so angry with him, he would have killed Nott for what he had done. But Snape's position with the Inner Circle meant he had to down play this and try his best to get Nott off.

After what seemed ages Dumbledore nodded his head. There will be no more Hogsmeade visits for you this year and for the next year. Your punishment will be decided by the Head of Gryffindor House as Mr. Potter belongs to that House. Mr. Weasley and Miss. Weasley I am very disappointed. You do not speak to a teacher like you did Mr. Weasley. To accuse a professor of being a death eater in public was in very bad taste. Your punishments will be decided by professor Snape."

As both Ron and Ginny opened their mouths to protest Dumbledore held up his hand and sent a quelling look that silenced both of them. "It was your reaction to some immature remarks that started the fight in the first place."

"The rest of you will receive detentions that the professors Snape and McGonagall will decide upon. You will receive your punishments tomorrow. Mr. Nott and indeed all of you here, the next time a student is caught casting a dark spell, that will result in expulsion and a visit to the auror office in the Ministry. Am I clear?"

Dumbledore looked once more at all of them and sent them away and went into the potions lab with Snape. The seventh year was already there and he had started the cauldrons. All of them worked in silence with Dumbledore looking on and it was late at night that the potions were finished.

Dumbledore thanked the three students and sent them to their common rooms and went with Snape to the infirmary where Harry still lay unconscious and in a stasis.

Snape assisted by Pomfrey removed the stasis and fed the potions to Harry who was still unconscious. Then she ran her wand and breathed a sigh of relief. The potions were working.

"Potter should be fine in a day or two. The potions are fine Severus." She told the tired man with a smile.

Dumbledore beamed at her and Snape and warning Pomfrey to ward the doors, both the Headmaster and his professor left for their rooms.

End of Chapter – 18

Chapter – 19

Harry had woken up the next day to an anxious Hermione and an angry and sulky Ron. He learnt about the way Ron had yelled at Snape and grinned at Ron, wondering inwardly how he was alive and standing here and not chopped and added into a potion after all that shouting at Snape.

Snape, Hermione told him, had merely called Ron in the morning, and had given him detention with Flich for the rest of the year, everyday and was banned from Hogsmeade weekends this year.

Ginny was also given detention for the next three months and when Snape had taunted he about why she and Ron should be upset about the name calling unless it were true, Ginny had retorted angrily and had yelled at him, and Snape had sneered at her and had extended her detention as well for the whole year (calling him a greasy snake and was a slimy Slytherin was not going to improve his temper that was already frayed because of worry over Harry).

Dumbledore had not been able to interfere as McGonagall whom he had initially thought would rake up an issue about year long detentions, did not say a word. He had been taken aback and was almost shocked but then decided that since Harry probably meant more to her than Ron and Ginny, she was fine with Snape's decision to punish the Weasley brother and sister.

McGonagall had been very scathing to the Slytherins and had punished Nott by giving him a detention everyday for the rest of the year with Hagrid. The others had detentions for the next three months. She and Snape had agreed on this so that Snape would also be able to hand over the same punishments to the two Gryffindors. She had yelled for about ten minutes at Ron and Ginny and had wound up saying they thoroughly deserved their punishments.

Snape had almost killed the Slytherins in private and had made Nott scrub cauldrons every week end without magic for the next two years as an additional punishment. The reason he gave Nott that petrified him was that if the Dark Lord ever got to know of how he had

behaved and hurt a boy who belonged to the Dark Lord for killing in a spectacular manner, then a direct killing curse would be too good for Nott. Nott had shivered in his shoes and had accepted the punishments quietly.

The other three Slytherins had received a tongue lashing of the worst type as Snape pointed out privately that the boy whom they had come to leaving their families, in hope that they would be saved would have died that day had Snape not kept his earring activated continuously as did McGonagall that enabled them to come there at once.

“All of us would have lost the war we wanted to wage had Harry died yesterday.” He said shivering a little thankful he had the foresight to activate his earring and keep it on. Otherwise Harry would not have lasted the time it would have taken Hermione and Neville to get him to the School infirmary. The Slytherins shivered along with him as they realized just what would have been lost if Harry had died that day.

While McGonagall was very scathing to Ron and Ginny, they had to face yet another humiliation that was in the form of a very loud howler from Molly Weasley, who had let her self go and threatened to pull them out of Hogwarts the next time a complaint like this reached her and Mr. Weasley.

Snape had sent angry letters that outwardly looked as if it were about their incredible rudeness, but had mentioned the entire incident and the way Ron and Ginny had conducted themselves and that Harry had been in danger of losing his life.

She had screamed for an astonishing five minutes and wound up by screeching , **“YOU ARE WORSE THAN THE TWINS BY NOT ONLY YOUR RUDENESS TO A PROFESSOR, BUT BY YOUR THOUGHTLESSNESS THAT PLACED HARRY IN SUCH DANGER THAT HE COULD HAVE DIED. ONE MORE COMPLAINT AND YOU COME BACK BOTH OF YOU AND YOU WILL SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIVES DE-GNOMING OUR GARDEN AND EARNING YOUR KEEP. YOU DESERVE THE PUNISHMENT YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND,”** here her volume went up a notch and

giving a headache to everyone in the Great Hall that morning for the rest of the day, ***"YOU BETTER MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE POLITE FROM NOW ON AND ESPECIALLY DURING YOUR DETENTIONS. ELSE..."*** that last word ended in a shriek making everyone place their hands to their heads and Ron and Ginny to run out of the Great Hall in mortification.

Harry had had a good laugh about it when he had heard about it and was rather sad he had missed that.

Harry was up and about in three days time. In that time he was visited by a lot of people, Gryffindors who came during the day and Snape, McGonagall and the other three Slytherins who were Harry's partners in turning the Wizarding World upside down, came at night to check up on him. The Slytherins apologized but Harry had brushed it off with a smile saying he would not listen to their apologies as the mistake was Ron's and Ginny's.

Hermione and Ron came everyday and spent some time. Hermione much to Ron's disgust came with Harry's books and soon they were involved in a lengthy discussion about human Transfigurations and other subjects.

On the third day Neville and Luna had come to study as well and soon all of them were studying various subjects. Ginny had also came along with Luna and sat down to study with a smile.

"Hello Harry, may I also study with you?" she had asked him with a charming smile, her eyes glinting with some other emotion.

"No," Harry had told her with a smile, and watched with satisfaction as her smile abruptly stopped and her eyes narrowed, "You must study with Luna. She is the one in your class."

Ginny had looked at him suspiciously for a long moment and then rolled her eyes and grinned, "Very funny." She said and sat down. No one else except Ron smiled back at her. Then there was no more trivial chit chat and all of them settled down.

On the third day Harry was allowed to leave the infirmary and join the others in classes, after being warned strictly by Pomfrey about taking it easy for a few days.

Harry had grinned at her and had run, making her shake her head with affection at the boy who spent so much time in the infirmary. Harry repaired to his classes and started his work straight away.

The days were full and Harry was busy and looked very happy, on the outside. On the inside though, there was a little bitterness every time he saw Ron, Ginny and Dumbledore. He could not forget Sirius and Regulus and the way Dumbledore had brought about the unfair imprisonment of his Godfather, both at Azkaban and Grimmauld Place.

At those times the sharp ache in his chest hurt him and spread all over. But by now Harry had learnt to hide his feelings very well and no one, not even Hermione was able to discern his bitterness or the sadness that was buried very deep inside him. Harry doubted he would ever heal fully about Sirius's fall into the veil.

Those feelings only made him more determined to work harder and he spread around the word that Sirius was his Godfather and he was dead because of Harry's lack of knowledge and he was going to study until he dropped. That made sure everyone understood his sudden studiousness. Ron of course wanted Harry to forget everything but had to keep silent when Harry brought up Sirius as he did not know how to respond to that.

So Harry studied and after the Hogsmeade incident, Ron and Ginny were now occupied by Flich all through the evening and after the horrible detentions, they had their own studies and assignments to complete. Harry had in the meantime formed firm friendships with Neville and Luna and had slowly extended it to Dean and Seamus, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot.

Now that group was almost always together and was called 'The Gang' by others. Ron and Ginny were part of this gang too, only their detentions did not allow them to be with 'The Gang' on week days. On week-ends, though they joined the others.

Ron was pretty happy with this as Harry always sat next to him and smiled and laughed with him as usual, though Hermione mostly sat with Neville or helped Luna with her OWLS that she would be taking that year and Ron was not able to get close with her the way he wanted to.

Ginny, though was another story. Harry did not even look at her except to say 'Hey Ginny' and then he forgot that there was someone by that name. He sat with Ron on one side and Hermione or Neville on the other and she did not know how to sit next to him, let alone become closer in the way Dumbledore had asked her to.

In the space of two months, Harry raised his academic performance to a slightly higher level, and started competing with Hermione, Draco and the other toppers, though he was still not able to beat Hermione's hard work of so many years and a natural ability to study, memorize and remember everything correctly.

He never got anything less than an 'E' in any subject though and enjoyed working hard. The Gryffindors and the two Hufflepuffs who sat and studied together slowly raised their level of their grades in all their classes.

In between all this, Harry concentrated on his aura sight and continued his studies on the Dark Arts and Blood Magic and most importantly the ancient magic that Harry by now was sure was the power the Dark Lord knows not. Harry's aura and the natural intelligence that had been until now stamped upon by the Dursleys and blocked by Dumbledore was now free of their manipulations and Harry blossomed fast and furious with the release of his magic.

Halloween came and that year for the first time Harry after asking Snape very shyly, held a ritualistic prayer for his parents who had died that very day fifteen years ago. He held it deep in the dungeons at midnight with Hermione, Draco, Pansy, Blaise, Snape and McGonagall. Snape had done the Samhain rituals and Harry remembered his parents and Sirius and he and Snape had prayers for Regulus and then all of them had said prayers for all those who had died in the war with Voldemort.

Snape had been overcome with emotion as the rituals had concluded and had hugged Harry close to him and had sat with Harry until the wee hours of the morning. Dumbledore had been unaware of any ritual happening deep in the dungeons because he was fast asleep thanks to two loyal house elves.

Harry had taken permission from Hermione and had promised her never to ill treat any elf and had Dobby and Winky bonded to him. Dobby had been ecstatic as had Winky to be bonded with Harry and had cheerfully and exuberantly agreed (Dobby), and tearfully and thankfully agreed (Winky), but Hermione had been less than pleased.

Harry had to argue with her before she would even think of agreeing to Harry's idea. Harry pleaded and begged and argued before she would consider.

"Hermione the house elf is known as that because they are natural house keepers. They love to work. Use your SPEW to improve the way they are being treated but don't say they should not work at all Hermione." he had pleaded.

She had not been convinced until Winky tugged her robes and had spoken softly to her. "We is not the high elves, Miss Grangey. We is the house elves. House elves is a half - breed between high elves and goblins and we needs to work all the time. That what keeps our magic alive. No work and our magic dies and we dies too. We have to be bound too, Miss Grangey. So please tells yes and makes Master Harry Potter bond with us."

Hermione had not been able to say a word after that and Harry successfully bonded with both of them. The first thing he had asked them to do was to make Albus Dumbledore sleep well on the night of Samhain so that he could perform the rituals without getting tense every other second. As they crept out for the rituals, Harry had cast a sleeping charm on Ron and Hermione had done the same after going to Ginny's dorm with Harry's invisibility cloak and had gone down to the dungeons.

A week after Halloween Dumbledore held the report card of Harry in his hands for the first two months and frowned. He had been asking for Harry's report card of his assignments and tests every two months

since Harry had started School. Then all the professors had understood and appreciated that Dumbledore was looking after an orphan boy who had saved them all from Voldemort at great personal cost.

Now unknown to him two of the professors knew why Harry's card was sent to the Headmaster. It was to make sure that Harry never learned too much and that his academic learning was only mediocre. So both of them knowingly and the other professors unknowingly sent glowing reports about the brilliance and excellence Harry was beginning to show.

Snape had tempered his report of Harry's sudden understanding and brilliance in potions by saying that it was because he was partnered by Pansy whose perfect potion making enabled Potter to survive. But Dumbledore knowing how to read in between Snape's lines was very thoughtful as he read the reports once again. He realized that Snape was baffled at the change and did not know how to turn this around to take points off Gryffindor and Potter.

While Dumbledore would have been amused by this, had it been any other Gryffindor, with Harry it made him worry. Of course Harry was not still the level of Hermione or Draco, the toppers every year or even a few other Slytherins and Ravenclaws who stayed consistently among the top six. But the fact he was getting there made him stop and think.

Then he called for an elf and asked it to summon Ron and Ginny to his office. They were in their detentions cleaning the owlery that they had been doing since they began detention and the owlery never seemed to be clean as they only had to clean one part and mover to the other before the owls would dirty the clean part with their droppings. The worse thing was the fact they had to do it without magic as Flich would take away their wands before detention and hand them over only when he allowed them to leave.

Snape had suggested this job to Flich who had accepted with glee and made sure that the two would do this dirty, thankless and completely useless, stinking and dirty job day after day all year.

The owls lead by Hedwig had also taken to using Ron and Ginny's head for their personal bathroom and the first time Hedwig had done that Ron had swung his arm to hit her not realizing that it was Harry's and not knowing that Hedwig had somehow sensed that Harry was not very happy with Ron and had taken this opportunity to punish him and Ginny.

Before Ron's hand could connect with her head, a blow that could have been fatal if Ron's hand had found her head, Hedwig had flown away swiftly. She had screeched at the other owls and from then onwards, Ron and Ginny were literally covered with droppings by the owls flying high so that they would not be hit.

Since they did not have their wand they could not retaliate the way they wanted to and nor could they clean themselves and Flich after watching the first day had asked Snape to come and place enchantments on the owlery so that Ron and Ginny would not come during the day and harm the owls there in revenge.

Now as the Headmaster's request came along, Ron and Ginny ignored the scowling Flich and his angry muttering about incomplete detentions and went thankfully to the bathrooms to refresh themselves and then to the Headmaster's office.

"I vote we somehow try and tell Dumbledore to lesson our punishments Ron." Ginny said tiredly. It was her OWL year and she was not doing as well she used to as most of her evenings were spent cleaning owl droppings.

"Yeah," Ron nodded, "We will beg him and I am prepared to do anything to escape this. We have been doing this only for about a month now and I feel like strangling any owl I see."

Ginny nodded too tired to reply. She still had piles to study and her job of enticing Harry had not even started and they were already two months into the new term.

They knocked at the Headmaster's office and went inside. Dumbledore was still looking at the reports of the various professors as they went in. Dumbledore looked up at them and bade them to sit down. He looked intently and sharply at their tired faces and posture.

“Do you have anything to tell me? I have Harry’s report here and all the professors are praising him and telling me that the Boy-who-Lived is finally working up to his potential.”

Ron looked very aggrieved as did Ginny. Both of them poured out their suffering and the lack of time to have any type of reasonable influence on Harry.

“Sir, Harry is now always studying and if I ask him, he says he does not want any more deaths on his head and shuts me up.” Ron started pouring out his grievances only to have Ginny’s shrill voice interrupt him.

“Sir I have just not been able to get near Harry. On all week days both Ron and I have detention and so Harry’s evenings are spent away from us. Week ends, the bloody boy studies and studies or says he needs some time alone,”

“Why?” Dumbledore’s query came sharply, “What does Harry do alone?”

“He says he needs to think about Sirius and also a few things you told him last year. He takes his invisibility cloak and wanders about, walking here and there. We checked on the map that he has of the School, the first time he did that. In fact Ron asked him for the map before he walked away saying he wanted to look at some girl in Ravenclaw, so that’s how we know.” Ginny explained.

“Sir, please do something about these detentions. Please. We are not able to touch Harry in any way all these two months.”

Dumbledore sighed. Snape would annihilate Gryffindor by taking points left, right and center if he tried to interfere with the punishments. That would place the Gryffindors on the offensive, and Dumbledore stopped at that point pondering hard; maybe there was something in that. It would make the Gryffindors and the Slytherins more divided.

His thoughts turned to the tired students in front of him. How silly could both of them get? They were proving that maybe there was something in what the Slytherins had taunted by reacting so badly.

“Please make sure that no one comes to know of our plans by restraining yourselves. Slytherins taunt by nature and you will do well to remember that.” He glared slightly at them and they gulped and nodded at once.

“I cannot do away with your detentions completely, but I will try and make it two to three days in a week. Harry’s studying is also not very exceptional to start worrying. If he has been studious as you say he is then the results are because of hard work and nothing else.”

Dumbledore paused there trying to get his thoughts in order. “Invite him to The Burrow for Christmas and try something then. Now you may go and I will do something about your well deserved detention.”

Both Ron and Ginny went red with humiliation and left the Headmaster’s office hurriedly, relieved that their detentions will reduce. Both brother and sister were deep in thought as they walked back to Gryffindor Tower, determined to succeed this time.

They went up and finding no one there decided to go up to their dorms and sleep early today and start their plan of action from the next day when Dumbledore would tell them officially that their detentions were reduced.

“Ron, remember we must say that we complained we had no time for studies to Dumbledore and he spoke to Snape and let us off. Don’t say anything more alright?”

Ron nodded impatiently and went to his bed and crashed, sleeping the sleep of a relieved man who need not clean the owlery everyday.

Dumbledore sighed after Ron and Ginny had left and called an elf once again to ask it to request Snape to come over. This would be a very difficult interview and Snape would be just livid if he was lucky and horrible if he was not.

Snape came striding in after five minutes. “You called Albus?” he asked at once wasting no time.

"Ah! Severus come in. Will you have some tea or something?" Dumbledore asked him smilingly and sighed yet again as Snape's expression became cautious. He really knew him very well, Dumbledore concluded.

"What do you want me to do Albus? Not something for Potter? No, no, I will do nothing for that brat." Snape said angrily.

Dumbledore smiled, "No nothing for Harry, Severus but yes for his friends Ron and Ginny Weasley. Both of them were here and begged me that the detentions be lessened as they had no time to study."

Snape was stunned. He had not expected that and did not react for a minute and then he flushed and was about to retort angrily, Dumbledore held up his hand in a gesture of peace.

"While Ron Weasley is not particularly studious, his sister was among the toppers and this year she says she is halfway down in the class lists. This is her OWL year and I thought you would relent."

"So you do not mind that a student calls me a git and a slimy snake and a death eater do you?" Snape's black eyes were flashing as he glared at Dumbledore bitterly, "*your Gryffindors* have to study for their OWLS, that alone matters, that alone is more important."

Dumbledore looked steadily at Snape, "You know it is not like that Severus. It is just that they are spending close to three hours in detention everyday that leaves them very little time to study."

"Nott is spending more than that time in detention Albus. You don't see him complaining do you?" Snape asked him sarcastically.

"Yes but Nott did cast a curse that could have very well killed Harry, Severus." Dumbledore explained patiently and winced inside as Snape's eyes flashed.

Snape was about to retort harshly when he looked down and he saw the report cards of Harry Potter on the desk and looked up after a good three minutes, "What will be the punishment for the Golden Boy's friends?" he asked in a voice choked by anger.

"Make it three days in a week." Dumbledore told him. Snape stood up immediately. "Is that all or is there more?" he asked now his voice and face under control looking steadily at the Headmaster.

Dumbledore shook his head slightly, "Thank you so much Severus. This will help in so many ways. You have been very kind to agree to my request."

Snape left without a word and Dumbledore knew Snape would take a long time before he would speak to the Headmaster as before if ever and Dumbledore would miss the clear and fast thinking, the sarcastic and sometimes outrageous comments of his potions professor. He would have never interfered normally but Harry was beginning to move away from his eye and he needed Ron and Ginny to bring him back to where he would be able to control Harry.

Snape was frothing at the mouth as he walked swiftly to the dungeons. He went directly into his chambers and into his bedroom and threw him self into a comfortable chair that was there by the side of his bed. He activated his earring and called out to Harry.

"Harry?" he called softly.

"Mmhh." Harry replied. That meant he was not alone. At that moment he heard Harry excuse him self to visit the bathroom and waited impatiently for Harry to respond. A few minutes later Harry answered him.

"Sev? What happened?" Harry was curious. Snape never disturbed him during the day. They spoke only in the night after Harry was safe behind his curtains and in his bed.

Snape told him the bitterness and anger still running strong through him. Harry was startled and then horrified.

"How could he? How could he reverse a detention give by a professor and this was for blatant rudeness and name calling, especially calling you a death eater. How dare he?"

Snape smiled grimly as he and Harry chatted angrily back and forth about the outrageousness of it all until Harry had to leave. He went back to the library and complained of an upset stomach and not giving anyone the chance to ask anything, left for his dorm. The others looked at each other for a moment before they shrugged and carried on. Only Hermione was upset but she too carried on as usual.

Harry stormed to his dorm and spelling the curtains securely as Ron was already sleeping and called Snape and the others and told McGonagall, Hermione and the Slytherins about it. Hermione, Draco and the others who were with others could not react but they heard everything.

Arran and Ria who were at their home also listened in and after Snape, Harry, Arran and McGonagall vented their anger by ranting and badmouthing Dumbledore and the two Weasleys, Harry demanded something be done. "It is so unfair that they get away like this. Severus could have gotten into real trouble with Voldemort." He finished indignantly.

"Well you are the son of a Marauder or not? From what you told me about your dad and Sirius, they would have paid back with interest and in very uncomfortable ways as well. And before you argue Dumbledore will find out, he will not as he will simply think Snape has taken some of the pranks of your dad and Sirius and asked his Slytherins to seek revenge. He will keep quiet and let it all blow over as it was his fault in the first place. What do you say?" Arran demanded of Harry. Harry blinked for a moment as what Arran said sunk into his head. Then,

"Brilliant." Shouted Harry in excitement making the others wince with the noise that smashed their ear drums. Then all of them grinned and started planning. "We have to make sure it also incapacitates him so much that he spends less time with us. Ginny too." He added.

Snape was laughing as was McGonagall. "Oh I can think of so many things your father did Harry, and not only to me but to other Slytherins as well. We will start from tomorrow and I will kick start the first prank."

"What is it Sev?" Harry asked eagerly.

“Wait and watch. When your dad played this trick on me and the other Slytherins, we missed classes for three days. It took us that much time to undo the bloody potion as we had to first analyze the potion that Potter and Black poured in our goblets, mixed with our pumpkin juice and brew the antidote. We had to beg the elves and get the pumpkin juice that had the potion. It was so mortifying I can tell you. Wait and watch Harry.” Snape refused to say another word much to the disappointment of the others and left the conversation saying he had stuff to do and would everyone please excuse him?

“What was it professor?” Harry asked McGonagall eagerly.

McGonagall had no clue. “Your father and his friends played so many pranks on the Slytherins and others it is difficult to say Harry. I do not remember. Severus and Lucius and a few others who were regularly targeted missed quite a few classes those days.”

“Make sure you guys watch what happens carefully. Ria and I want to see the whole thing in the pensieve.” Arran said wistfully, he never knew the joys of School and this part sounded like so much fun.

“Sure.” All of them who could speak safely said at the same time making him and Ria laugh and on that note they parted.

The next morning Harry was up and early. He jumped out of bed and activating his earring woke up the others as well. He was very exited and very fidgety and he rushed to wash and soon with clean robes went down and met Hermione and both of them went to the Great Hall, not bothering to wait for the others.

As they entered the Great Hall Harry and Hermione met with the Slytherins, whom Snape had called in the morning to explain about the lessening of Ron and Ginny’s detention. Nott was already planning to approach Dumbledore to have his punishments eased a little as well; detentions which included terrifying nightly forays into the Forbidden Forest.

“So the Golden Boy got his friends off is it?” Draco hissed angrily at Harry. Harry whipped out his wand and frowned.

“Malfoy, what are you saying?”

"As if you don't know Potter." Nott snarled at Harry angrily. "Your friend the bloody Weasel has had his detentions cut into half."

"What?" Harry turned to look enquiringly at Hermione, who shrugged and shook her head. "Well," Harry told the Slytherins, "I have no clue what you are saying and if you are not going to start another fight here, let us go. Of course if you do want to fight, I am ready."

The Slytherins banged into him as they went into the Great Hall and wincing Harry followed them and went inside. Harry and Hermione went to their regular places and started eating and taking out a book each, started reading.

The staff table was full and Snape was scowling at everyone there.

"You must be very happy Minerva. Your students have got away with their rudeness. They are *Gryffindors* after all." Snape sneered quietly, his voice full of anger as he glanced at Dumbledore.

"Which students are you talking about Severus? I do not understand." Minerva's voice was very confused as she looked at him and then at the Headmaster.

Dumbledore sighed and explained. Minerva was taken aback. "I hope this will not mean Nott will come to me or to you for the same purpose Albus. I will not allow his punishments to be reduced." She told him.

"Oh Nott will be in Albus's office just after breakfast with the same request. The Slytherins are not happy Minerva and I am afraid Albus must give the same concessions to Nott and indeed the other Slytherins."

That started a heated argument between Snape and McGonagall, "Nott used a dark curse that could have killed Harry, Severus. Surely you are not telling me that I should reduce punishments for them."

"Calling me a death eater could have blown my cover, Minerva. Just imagine if someone had demanded to see my left forearm. The commotion it would have caused would have been truly dangerous not only from the Ministry's side but also from the Dark Lord." Snape shot back just as incredulously as McGonagall had.

They argued back and forth with Dumbledore silent in between them. The Great Hall in the meantime slowly filled up and Ron and Ginny with Neville, Seamus and Dean came down and threw themselves on the benches.

“Harry, I got away. Now Ginny and I will have detention only two to three days a week. Isn’t it great?” Ron was beaming and Ginny was sitting next to Ron and smiling brightly at Harry.

Harry did not even look at Ginny. He beamed back at Ron. “Hey that is great. What happened?”

Ron told him what he and Ginny had planned to reveal the day before. “Well Ginny has her OWLS and I was lagging so far behind in our classes. We went and pleaded to Dumbledore and after reading us a lengthy lecture, he said he will see. But from Dumbledore that means all right, isn’t it?”

Harry nodded grinning, wondering inwardly, what the prank was and when it will be played.

Ron was now tucking into his breakfast with gusto and so was Ginny. Soon breakfast was over and Dumbledore came up to them to tell them of their reduced detention and then a beaming Ron and Ginny and a very outwardly happy Harry and Hermione got up to leave for their classes.

Suddenly there was a blowing sound from Ron and a squelching sound from Ginny and two loud unearthly shrieks and everyone turned to look at the source of that noise, drawing their wands and holding it at the ready.

Harry turned as did everyone to the place from where the screams were originating and looked horrified at the two Gryffindors, who were looking down at themselves in horror. Then they looked up at each other and then they screamed.

Ron now had waist long red hair in curls of all things and his flat chest was now very full. Ginny on the other hand had a completely flat chest and her hair was now cropped in a military style and she had a

flowing moustache and a beard, both red in color. The beard came up to her chest and the moustache covered her lips.

Both Ron and Ginny screamed again, as everyone looked at them in horror and amusement at the change. Harry was so startled as he tried to think of how Snape and Lucius Malfoy would have looked so many years ago and no wonder they did not want to come out until they had brewed the antidote. Ron suddenly realized he was missing something in between his legs and squeaked in horror, just as Ginny felt something unfamiliar in between her legs and she screamed once again.

Then there was pandemonium as everyone propelled by Malfoy and the others came to look at Ron and Ginny and the laughing started. Screams of laughter sounded in the Great Hall and many flashes indicated that many photos were taken of the extraordinary transformation and that was the last straw as Ron started yelling at everyone.

“Hey, shut up.” Was all he said before *he* shut up as fresh laughter started at his squeaky shrill voice that sounded like a girl in distress? Ginny gaped at Ron’s voice, now scared to say anything in case her voice too had changed.

Harry was now red with the effort of trying not to laugh and he grabbed Ron’s hand and slowly dragged him off. Hermione did the same with Ginny who looked at her and started sobbing and then stopped a second later in horror. She had a manly voice that was sooo deep. She stared at Hermione in terror, who was biting her cheeks in a mighty effort not to laugh and looking straight led Ginny behind Ron and Harry.

Ron was felt up by so many people and he squeaked in a high alto every time someone squeezed him to see if all that extra growth was for real. It was unfortunately very real and poor Ron had a rough time until he and Harry cleared the Great Hall. He was squeezed and pinched everywhere. Then Harry took his hand and ran with him to the infirmary, where Madam Pomfrey was most astonished.

“Please help me.” Ron spoke in a shrill voice and then gulped and stopped. Harry taking pity on him explained the situation to her just as

Ginny complete with moustache and beard came sobbing in a very deep voice.

Pomfrey looked very amused and even chuckled much to the mortification of Ron and Ginny and raising her wand started casting spell after spell. After half an hour, by which time the doors of the infirmary that was open was filled by students who wanted to see the transformed pair.

"Hey Ron," Seamus shouted cheerfully, "Have you got your bits or have they gone too?" as Ron went red and turned away a small Hufflepuff boy asked Seamus, "How will he pee?" and that was the end of Ron's control as he ran to a bed with a huge sob and drew the curtains around him as did Ginny. Pomfrey shooed all those who had been gathered there and then called for Snape.

"Why?" Ron squeaked his eyes wide and full of fear as Pomfrey called for Snape.

"This needs potions. This has been caused by a prank that is a combination of a spell and potion. Professor Snape is the best man for this." At that time Snape billowed his way into the infirmary sneering at Ron and Ginny who cringed as they realized that they were now dependent on Snape for changing them back.

"I am a death eater Poppy. Will these two accept my potions?" they gulped as he glared at them smirking at their condition. "What has happened Weasley?" and ran a wand over both of them scanning them.

"I will take at least two days to brew the proper anti dote. You will be fine until then." Snape told them carelessly and turning away strode out, his robes billowing after him.

Ron bit his lip in an effort not to cry. "Two days. What will I do?"

"You will stay here Mr. Weasley. Right here along with your sister." Dumbledore said kindly as he walked towards them, his blue eyes twinkling with amusement.

"Thank you Sir." came two voices one shrill and the other very deep. Dumbledore blinked for a minute before his famous self control came to his rescue. He smiled gently at the two unfortunate Weasleys and then walked out swiftly, needing to go to his office and have a hearty laugh.

Harry and Hermione left Ron and Ginny who were in a pretty bad state and went back to the Great Hall where everyone surrounded them. Harry told all about Snape making the potion in two days time and until then they would stay in the infirmary.

That day was a very cheerful day for everyone, even Snape who did not take away a single point off Gryffindor.

Two days later a shaken Ron and a nervous Ginny came out of the infirmary and were greeted by a lot of catcalls and shouts. In the two days they had been absent there had started a prank war in Hogwarts that made the teachers recall the days of the infamous Marauders.

The next day all the Slytherins sported red and golden hair and then it was war. In the next one and a half months all the Houses of Hogwarts were privy to some of the worst pranking after the days of the Marauders. The day after the Slytherins had red hair, the Gryffindors had their robes flashing green and silver the whole day.

And so it went on and on and on. The purpose of the pranks were to make Ron and Ginny so nervous that Harry would be able to beg off the almost sure invite he and Hermione were to get for Yule to The Burrow. Ron was targeted once more when his robes up to his waist vanished until lunch. Whatever he wore, his chest was bare and after changing into all his robes, Ron once again stayed in the infirmary until the spell worked off.

Ginny was a mass of nerves that day and she went clutching her robes tightly to herself. After that Ron and Ginny stayed in their dorms the whole day once classes were over.

One week after Ron lost his clothes up to his waist another prank was played on them. Every time Ron or Ginny spoke they lost their hair for the next ten minutes. Needless to say they stopped speaking for the

next four days for it took that long for that particular spell to wear off. Almost the entire School provoked them into speaking those four days and Ron and Ginny went as bald as Kingsley Shacklebolt during that time.

They became nervous wrecks and jumped every time anyone cleared their throats around them. They also stopped eating from their plates and Ron and Ginny lost a lot of weight in those one and a half months. They still had detentions three days a week, but apart from that they were in their dorms, their curtains drawn tightly around their bed.

Harry was left fine and free as was the purpose of all these pranks that were engineered by Snape, McGonagall and two loyal elves by name Dobby and Winky. Harry made full use of all this time and when the Yule holidays came, Ron and Ginny went to The Burrow and Harry and Hermione opted to stay on in School to give Ron and Ginny some time to recuperate. Dumbledore could not protest as Ron readily agreed glad to go to a place where he could eat and relax without fear.

Harry was alone in the castle along with Hermione and two other first years in Gryffindor, and a few third years in Ravenclaw. There were no Hufflepuffs and Slytherins as Draco and the others had already been called for a death eater meeting the night they would reach home and it was only them and the professors for the holidays.

End of Chapter – 19

Chapter – 20

Harry and Hermione breathed a sigh of relief as they walked down to the School after seeing off Ron and the others at Hogsmeade station. They had been accompanied by McGonagall and taking her permission, they took a detour to The Three Broomsticks first to have some butterbeer and discuss a few things that Harry wanted to do these holidays.

Voldemort had been quiet until now and Snape had told Harry that there was a meeting scheduled for later. Now McGonagall discreetly cast a notice me not charm and a privacy spell around them and they started discussing.

“Professor, can we get away these holidays for a few hours to meet with Arran, Ria and the others? I have not seen Arran since School started.” Harry asked her wistfully.

McGonagall shook her head and looked at him a little sympathetically. “Harry it would be better if we do not give any grounds for doubt to the Headmaster at all. You must utilize this time for learning about your gifts.”

Harry nodded glumly. He had anticipated this answer, though to hear it made it kind of final. How did Arran say they would divide their attacking period into three times in a year if Harry was never able to get out of Dumbledore’s control?

They finished their butterbeer and paying Rosemerta, they walked slowly to the castle. On the way, Harry cast a privacy spell around them and turned to McGonagall. “What if Dumbledore were incapacitated? We could do something then?” he asked her with hope in his eyes.

McGonagall thought about it and slowly nodded her head making Harry’s spirits lift a little. “We can legitimately get out to Diagon Alley under the pretext of shopping for presents one day. After that maybe we could make sure Albus is under the weather for a few days. It is

very cold after all. Let us see Harry. I will speak to Severus and try to come up with something.”

Harry nodded and smiled at her. “What do you want to do Harry apart from visiting with Arran and the others that you need to get out of Hogwarts so desperately?” Hermione asked him.

“I have a few ideas that I have been thinking about and reading upon the last three months. I want to talk about them. And I will say what they are when we are all together.” Harry refused to say a word more.

They reached the School by then and McGonagall removed the privacy spell and briskly walked inside nodding formally to Harry and Hermione just in case Dumbledore was looking down from any of the windows.

Harry and Hermione ambled around the grounds discussing loudly about their studies, especially Runes. Harry was taking his OWLS in that subject that year and Hermione was asking him all kinds of questions to check his preparation. Harry saw Dumbledore’s aura once as it came within hearing range and then it walked away.

They walked to the Great Hall and went inside in time for lunch. They found only one table set in the center and most of the professors were already sitting down and chatting casually. They looked up and smiled at Harry and Hermione before they resumed their conversations. Snape scowled at them before turning off to speak softly with McGonagall.

Harry ate his food silently and then went off to the Room of Requirement to begin his study on ancient magic. Hermione joined him, though she studied the Dark Arts and advanced potions.

They worked hard for the whole day and they were not disturbed at all. At dinner Harry amused himself by seeing the various auras around him and trying to decipher their meanings and by that trying to come on to a on the spot analysis about their characters. As dinner slowly came to an end, Harry turned to McGonagall with a small smile.

“Professor, may Hermione and I be excused to go shopping tomorrow to Diagon Alley?”

She smiled back. "Of course Harry. I will accompany you there myself as I too have some shopping to do. We could split it up two days. Do one half tomorrow and the other the day after. What do you say?"

"Great professor." Harry beamed and turned to Hermione, "Come on I have to make lists."

Both of them excused themselves and talking normally about various gifts and presents that they would give to various people, left the room.

"Severus, will you come with me tomorrow as additional protection for Harry? What do you say Albus, or will you come?" she asked the Headmaster

who smiled at her?

"I have some work to finish Minerva. If Severus is free he may accompany you. Else I will request Alastor to come along."

Snape grumbled, "That would be best Albus. Moody would be the best guard for the Golden Boy."

"For that I demand you come with me. Guard indeed Severus. That boy needs protection and you of all people know it." she said coldly.

Snape sneered at her and was about to say something rude when Dumbledore interrupted him, "Come on Severus. You must have some shopping to do as well. Accompany Minerva and I will send for Alastor as well." And got up and excusing himself left with a smile and a twinkle before Snape could protest.

After Dumbledore had left, McGonagall and Snape too, excused themselves and kept up the charade until they parted ways. Then Snape went to his rooms and activating the earring told Harry what had happened. Harry was very disappointed about Moody accompanying them.

"Why did McGonagall ask Dumbledore at all Sev? And why did you grumble?" he asked very down. "If you had accepted maybe Moody would not have come."

“Harry has all that you have gone through with our beloved Headmaster taught you nothing?” Snape asked him patiently.

“What do you mean Sev?” Harry was puzzled.

“Albus would never let you go off alone without Ron, Ginny, Moody or himself accompanying you Harry. They are the ones in the ‘other’ plan, remember? If I had not protested as I usually do Albus would have become suspicious and please do not underestimate Albus or the Dark Lord, Harry. Both are very powerful, intelligent and very clever wizards. We have been lucky so far, but give them a small clue and we are finished.”

Harry sighed. What Snape was saying was so very truthful. They had been incredibly lucky this far and they must tread carefully lest Dumbledore suspected something.

“I am so sorry Sev. I shouldn’t have taken it on you.” Harry was cut off by Snape who spoke softly, “Idiot Gryffindor. Who else would you take it on? Now,” briskly Snape continued, “even if we do not meet with Arran and the others it is of little consequence. What is most important is you studying hard and keeping everything we know under cover and to that effect I have disagreed with Minerva as it would be better if I don’t slip any potions to Albus.

“He knows I am behind the pranking of the Weasley brother and sister and he has kept quiet as he was in the wrong about reducing their punishments. We cannot take a risk and make him suspicious about why he should fall ill suddenly and then find out through the wards that all of us, especially you have been outside the castle.”

Harry agreed and in a better frame of mind after talking a bit more to Snape, he and Hermione discussed the various gifts and other purchases they wanted to make.

The next morning Harry, Hermione McGonagall and a scowling Snape flood off from the Headmaster’s office into Diagon Alley. They met Moody there and walked through the barrier and went straight to Gringotts. Harry had already written to the goblins and told them he did not want to be recognized when he came in.

Though Harry did not need to visit his vault to withdraw money, he had a money pouch that would enable to access money directly after all, he had to keep appearances and so he went inside with Moody and not with Snape or McGonagall who had to visit their vaults as did Hermione. Harry withdrew large sums of money saying he wanted to spend lavishly and spurge as Moody lifted his non-magical eyebrow at him.

Then they went shopping buying various things for everyone. Harry went straight to the Weasley Wizarding Wheezes first. For Ron, Harry got a huge box of the Weasley pranks and he added a lot of pranks for his own use and spent a little time chatting with them about Ron's misfortune.

The Twins noted that Harry had not bothered about Ginny's misfortune as well and nor had he shown the anger he would have last year at the way Ron had been treated. They put it away to talk about it later and went about their jobs as cheerfully as ever.

For Mrs. Weasley Harry got a nice scarf and for Mr. Weasley he had already ordered a small mp3 player with cds both modern and classical. He had also got a lot of batteries and a manual that would tell Mr. Weasley how to use it.

The twins would receive a few muggle joke books that would make them think of converting those jokes into magical pranks. The books he had already ordered from Barnes & Nobles. He had not got Ginny anything as he never got her anything usually and he kept up with that.

In Flourish and Blotts Harry got rare books on Runes and Charms for Hermione, he knew she would enjoy and he added some books on Transfiguration for McGonagall and him, though he did not gift wrap any of the books. As they walked around Flourish & Blotts, Moody left McGonagall in charge to walk across for some purchase of his own.

"I will be back in ten minutes Minerva." He told her gruffly. "If anyone attacks, use the portkey and take Potter to safety okay." McGonagall rolled her eyes and smiled at him as he nodded. "Constant vigilance Minerva. Do not mock at that." He told her darkly and left.

Hermione was looking through various books on Defense and Harry was soon wandering to the back of the huge shop and was browsing along when he came to a door that said '**Used Books**'. Curious he walked inside and found rows and rows of old and used books, sorted by subject.

Harry came out and seeing McGonagall searching for him, called out to her and saying he would be inside browsing and waited for her to nod and smile before he took off.

The room smelled dusty and old and Harry went row by row looking at the books which though were old and used, were neatly bound and had their name written on the binding.

Harry walked through the subjects like Charms, Transfiguration, Defense and the like and soon came to the back of the used books room to two rows that said '**Assorted and Misc. Books**'.

Harry slowed down and started looking for any book that caught his fancy. He had walked through half a row, when the words Ancient Magic leaped out of a huge book. Harry carefully pulled it out and found the book to be charmed feather light and in a very good condition. He was very excited as he looked through the book and saw it had the basics of the ancient magic, its working and its theories.

Harry placed it in the basket that he had with the other books and walked along. Soon he had four more books on ancient magic and then he came to a book that said. '**Potions**' and the author was some one called **Morgana**. He opened the book and found it in excellent condition and the date inside said 'Samhain 568'.

Harry gaped at that book as the date meant that it was over a thousand five hundred years old and still was in a condition that was pretty good. The paper was very thick and stiff, but probably had a lot of spells woven into it for preservation. He put that down carefully and soon picked up a more books that looked very old and dirty on ancient magic, Potions, Runes, Wards and Parsel magic.

There were so many books on Parsel Magic that Harry was astounded. He picked up as many as he could and then he browsed a bit more and walked to the end of the row. There was nothing much

of interest and Harry walked through the other row, picking a few more old books on conjuring and the Dark Arts and Blood Magic.

Then Harry came out and started walking towards the outer shop and casting a privacy spell upon him, he activated the earring, "professor, can you divert Moody. I have too many books here that I don't want him to see."

McGonagall hummed and as Harry walked he heard Moody being engaged in an argument on a book on dueling and Harry quickened his steps and casting a notice me not charm, he walked swiftly to the counter and placed his many books on it.

Waiting impatiently and a bit worriedly as the clerk rang his purchases Harry breathed a sigh of relief as he paid off the bill and the clerk packed everything and shrunk it for him. The notice me not charm helped and as soon as Harry walked away the clerk forgot all about the boy who had made such a big and a very different type of purchase.

Harry with all his purchases shrunk and held safely in his pocket that he had already cast charms for anything he may place inside them to look innocuous went outside with an apology on his lips. "I am so sorry professor," he said looking only at McGonagall making Snape scowl and glare at Harry and Moody chuckle gruffly at the intended insult, not realizing that he too had been insulted by that gesture and shrugging of Snape's glare that turned to him.

They also went to other shops where Harry bought a lot of parchment, quills, owl treats for Hedwig and potion ingredients.

"If you have finished everything Potter, then we can skip tomorrow." Moody told him as they entered Hogwarts, that afternoon totally tired. "But I have to buy a few clothes as well. I had thought we would shop for them tomorrow." Harry protested.

"Why couldn't you do all that today?" Snape snarled at him and turning to McGonagall he spoke very softly making her frown and nod her head. "Well of course you cannot come with us tomorrow Severus. I am sure Albus will understand." She said making Snape look very happy.

“Why?” Moody asked Snape suspiciously.

“Of course he cannot. In fact Harry I think we must postpone our trip for clothes for another day as You-Know-Who will attack Severus for not giving him that information. Once he can say he was called on the spur of the moment, but twice, I think not. It would be best to postpone, I am afraid.”

Moody nodded as Harry agreeing completely with her, looked sulky, “Well we can go off on our own. It will be fun.” The implication of a fun trip without Snape obvious, making him snarl at Harry in distaste. McGonagall placated him by murmuring to him and Snape walked swiftly to the dungeons, the moment they reached the main doors.

The next few days went quietly with Harry and Hermione deep in studies. Harry had taken out the books on ancient magic and found them to be a mine of information about a power that only Snape and Arran seemed to know today. The ancient tome about the equally ancient magic was very interesting. Harry asked Snape and Arran about any doubt he may have as he read along, and he had many of them. They were only too happy to help and Harry was learning and learning fast.

On Midwinter Harry and Hermione were invited to The Burrow for lunch. Harry could not give his gifts to Snape and McGonagall at the School directly and he just left the two books on their desks in the morning, the Potions by Morgana for Snape and the detailed Transfiguration book that he knew McGonagall did not have and would enjoy, for her.

Snape noticed the book and was so thrilled with it that he activated his earring and thanked Harry repeatedly. Harry laughed at Snape’s thrill and he thanked Snape and McGonagall for the books they had given him on Blood Magic and the Dark Arts.

Soon it was time to go to The Burrow and Harry and Hermione flood apprehensively along with the others to be enveloped in a bear hug from Molly Weasley. Mr. Weasley beamed at them and shook their hands welcoming all of them into The Burrow.

Molly Weasley was thrilled to have them and after hugging both of them she took them aside and told them not to speak a word about the horrible pranking as that topic put Ron and Ginny into a state of panic. Harry only too gladly agreed.

“Really it was too bad. The pranking I mean Harry. Both Ron and Ginny are very frazzled and the word prank puts them into a state of panic.” Molly was unhappy about the state of her last two children and Harry tried his best to look as affected as her but he was sure he did not succeed. Thankfully Molly was thinking about the state they had come home with a frown on her forehead and she did not notice Harry’s failure in looking enraged on Ron’s and Ginny’s behalf.

All the Weasley children were there and the whole atmosphere was very loud and boisterous and happy. Harry greeted Ron cheerfully and turned to Bill and Charlie who had also come there. Percy as usual was missing. Soon all of them were chatting very happily and only two pairs of eyes noticed that Harry and Hermione were not talking as they would have to Ron.

Harry was sitting with Bill and asking him something about curse breaking and Hermione was helping Molly Weasley in the kitchen. Ron was sitting with Bill and Harry but was contributing very little to the conversation. Ginny was totally ignored and the Twins after greeting Harry and Hermione in their usual way sat back and observed.

They had tackled Harry at once and it was George who was the more observant of the two who noticed that Harry was not all that happy to be there. So after their initial welcome, he had dragged Fred back and they had watched, and they were very puzzled.

“Well if it isn’t,” George had greeted Harry and had grinned at him as Fred continued,

“Our partner,”

“You mean our partner in crime Gred,”

“No Forge, I mean,”

Harry started laughing, "Guys stop it, How are you?"

"Fine,"

"But ickle Ronniekins and ickle sweet Ginny are not."

"What happened to them?" Fred asked Harry suddenly seriously and Harry blinked.

Harry told them what happened. Fred laughed saying it was a point for Ron and Ginny to hit out at the Slytherin death eaters and Snape at The Three Broomsticks, and it was at that time George noticed the strain in Harry's face as he struggled to act normal.

The Twins decided to get Harry and Hermione alone and ask them what had happened, when they saw Ginny literally throw herself at Harry and Harry just smiling at her and not saying a word more. They frowned when another voice spoke behind them, "So you two noticed as well hmm?"

The Twins whirled around to see Charlie Weasley there lounging casually on the wall and looking at Harry, who was still determinedly talking only to Bill, though he included Ron in to their conversations every two minutes. Ron seemed to not notice anything, but Charlie could see the wheels moving in Bill's brains as he spoke to Harry.

"Did you know Harry did not want to come over to The Burrow?" George told Charlie.

"What?" Charlie exclaimed softly, "Why? I thought Harry thought of this as his home and that Ron and Hermione had a thing for each other and why is Ginny throwing herself at Harry? Has she no shame, Harry is ignoring her quite deliberately."

"Yeah," Fred told him slightly angry as he watched Ginny, "She has no shame, our Ginny. Harry told mum in a letter that he and Hermione wanted to give Ron some time to recover and he had not mentioned Ginny at all. Not even to ask mum how she was. I remember Ginny asking mum about whether Harry had enquired after her and when mum said no, she was pretty irritated."

“What did he get Ron?” Charlie asked, becoming intrigued at Harry and Hermione’s behavior. He was very normal to the others and he had seen the beautiful and very expensive scarf he had got his mother and the song thing for his father that had made him go into raptures. But he had been called by a friend from Romania on the floo and he had missed the other gifts.

Harry had not got him and Bill anything as he had not known they were there and anyway Harry was not very close to either of them. Fred told Charlie what Harry had given them and Ron, “But he did not get Ginny anything. Neither did Hermione. She gave Ron a book on Quidditch.”

Charlie watched Harry and Hermione and saw clearly how uncomfortable he and Hermione were. He watched carefully all afternoon and then on the spur of the moment went to his mother and whispered something. She beamed and nodded and went to Harry who was now sitting on the couch and playing chess with Ron.

“Harry why don’t you and Hermione stay tonight and leave tomorrow for Hogwarts? In fact you should have been here for the entire holidays but at the very least you must stay for a day. I will speak to Albus and tell him that I will send you both after breakfast tomorrow. Alright?” she asked him affectionately.

Charlie and the Twins watched Harry and Hermione carefully staying hidden and they saw the tightening of his jaw and the panic in his eyes and the distaste in Hermione’s face as well, before it was covered and then he resignedly agreed, “But Mrs. Weasley we will leave tomorrow. Ron here still needs his rest.” He said smiling at Ron.

What was shocking to Charlie and the Twins was the fact that Ron did not say a word but Ginny more than made up for it. “That is great Harry.” She lowered her voice in what was apparently a seductive attempt, though Harry seemed only nauseated by it, “We could have such fun.” Her mother frowned at the blatant way she was throwing herself at Harry and Harry was looking very uncomfortable and Hermione was looking furious.

“Well Harry was very interested in curses of all sorts today. Whew! I never knew until now that he was more interested in them rather than

joke along with Ron. And when did Ginny become a seducer?" Bill said softly coming up silently behind Charlie and winking at him. Charlie and the Twins dragged him away out of the house and told him what they had observed.

Bill had also thought something was off with Harry and Hermione and had thought of it as a minor fight, but now as he looked at Harry playing yet another chess game with Ron (he was trashed in the first game), he agreed with Charlie and the Twins that something was wrong.

Hermione was sitting slightly apart and was glancing at Harry now and then in a way no one would notice unless you happened to watching her continuously as he was now and he wondered. Harry was one of the nicest persons he had met and this Harry and Hermione greatly confused him.

The Twins went to work and dosed the drinks of everyone except Harry and Hermione, Bill, Charlie and themselves of course. Soon Ron was yawning as was Ginny and Molly shooed them off to their beds and went to sleep herself.

No one noticed that Arthur Weasley had not had his drink as he had taken it into the kitchen when he went to keep something there and it had slipped from his hand and fallen down. He had repaired the glass but had not taken the sleeping potion mixed into his drink.

George for good measure cast a sleeping spell on Ron and Ginny and came back downstairs where a nervous Harry and Hermione were preparing to go to bed and wait for the next day so that they could leave for Hogwarts.

Molly Weasley had slept the moment she lay down and Arthur Weasley who was not feeling very sleepy decided to listen to some songs on his cds. He got up to fetch them from the drawing room where he had left it and came down and then stopped as he heard his sons speak to Harry. Normally he would not have listened, but the way Ginny had thrown herself at Harry and the way Harry had looked so uncomfortable with her made him pause. Maybe he would know something.

Meanwhile the Twins were only waiting for their parents to go upstairs before they went up to place additional sleeping spells on Ron and Ginny. George came back not realizing that his father came a minute after him and went into the living room, "Ok brothers all set. Ron, Ginny mum and dad are sleeping." Arthur Weasley stopped at those words and waited casting a silencing charm on him and hiding in a dark corner from where he could watch all of them.

At George's words all the Weasley's nodded and Harry frowned. "What for George? I think I will go to bed as well. Coming all of you?"

"Oh no you don't Harrykins. There is a lot we want to know."

"The first being,"

"Fred's words were cut off by Bill placing a hand over his mouth. "Shut up. Do you want everyone to get up?" Bill looked up at Harry and Hermione who were looking very alarmed and smiled.

"Hey! There is no need to get scared Harry. We just want to know what is wrong?" at those words Harry froze and glanced for a second at Hermione. She was scared too. "What is wrong? Nothing Bill. Absolutely nothing. Really." Harry told him his voice shaking just a bit.

"There is no need to lie Harry. No one will come here. We have given sleeping potions to everyone mixed with their drinks and no one will disturb us." Arthur Weasley gasped at that comment. That was why Molly had slept so fast and he was awake because he had dropped his glass.

"I am not lying Bill. Why should I?" Harry was getting angry.

"You tell me." Bill told him casually not minding the anger, in fact completely ignoring it. "But remember none of us will leave here until we know what the fallout with Ron is, why is Ginny throwing herself at you and why you and Hermione are so hesitant to come here and be with us? You would have loved to stay last year. What changed and before you get angry and tell me to mind my business, I wish to know because all of us here care for you and I hope you will not take it in any other way."

"You can tell us anything Harry. Remember the Twins can spy for you at Diagon Alley and Bill can get you all sorts of information from Gringotts and I can do my bit as well. And if you are uncomfortable about mum, dad or Dumbledore knowing we won't tell anyone about what you need to know unless it is very dangerous and Ron and Ginny can help you along with Hermione at School watching your back."

"Oh! They do that already now." Harry clamped his mouth shut even as Hermione hissed, "Harry keep quiet." But the damage was done and all the five Weasleys tensed up at those words.

No body said anything and all of them sat there silently each waiting for the other to speak. Finally Bill spoke up, "Harry what is it? Should I promise on my magic that I will not tell anything you tell me to Ron and Ginny as they seem to be in the center of everything?"

"If you want that then we will but please don't shut everyone out and tell us what is happening?" Fred told him as serious as Harry had ever seen him.

Harry despaired and he really did not know how he could speak against two of their own to them. But when it looked they would be there all night, he cleared his throat and looked at Hermione's frightened face for a second and spoke softly, "Yes there is something and no, Ron is not aware of it. Please don't tell him."

"Well what is it?" Bill asked him looking at his brothers in confusion.

"I really cannot tell you Bill. Please don't force me, you will not like it." Harry told him.

Now the Weasleys were worried, "Like what Harry? Is it something that Ron and Ginny did?" spot on thought Bill as Harry flushed and Hermione gasped. Bill stopped and looked around at the others for a second only. Then he turned to Harry, "I Bill Weasley will not reveal what ever you say here without your consent." The others also said the same and a golden swirl of magic came out of them and hovered near Harry waiting for him to accept it.

Harry stood up, "Really this is ridiculous Bill. You don't have to do all this."

"But I already have and none of us are leaving until we have got to the bottom of the issue. You see Harry you are family. This is what we would do for any of the others. Now come on accept that oath and tell us what is troubling you. We only want to help."

Well you can't." cried Harry frustrated as he realized they were pressurizing him emotionally. "Tell me can you go against your brother and sister? For that is what you will be doing if you listen to me and get to the bottom of the issue. Please let us go to bed forgetting this conversation and my only request to you are please don't tell your parents or Ron and Ginny."

There was a shocked silence as the Weasleys took this in. Arthur was totally shaken as he stood there listening to Harry and his children. What had happened?

"Harry please accept the oath all of us have given you. We may not be rich or high class but we are loyal and we stand by ours. If Ron and Ginny have done something to you, then we will talk it out and sort it out. Come on." Charlie's words frightened Harry and Hermione and both of them said, "Please don't tell them," and Hermione looked at Harry, "Accept the oath Harry. They will not be able to tell Ron and Ginny anything then."

Harry immediately accepted the oath and looked at them, "Remember you cannot tell them or your parents anything."

"Mum and dad are also involved?" Bill asked shocked.

"No, of course not, your parents are the greatest Bill. But you must not tell them all this. They still have not got over Percy."

"Percy? Then what Ron did was like Percy?" Charlie asked them.

Harry fell silent. After a minute or two Charlie continued, "We are going to sit here all night, Harry. We don't mind, but remember mum gets up early in the morning and you will have to answer her and she will simply bulldoze you."

“Harry tell them.” Hermione’s voice was low and clear in the silence of the room.

“Are you mad Hermione?” Harry asked her incredulously.

“They care Harry and they will not let go. Before they decide to take this to others it would be better if you tell them, in fact show them if you can.” she said warning in her voice meaning if they took this to their father or Dumbledore. The Weasleys looked at each other and at Harry at the conversation he and Hermione were having.

Harry suddenly stood up and looked at the Weasleys. “Stay here, I will come with a pensieve.” And he went to the fire and flood out. Arthur almost came out of his hiding place but Harry had already left and there was a tense silence as the Weasleys were beginning to understand the seriousness of their conversation with Harry.

Harry came back in less than three minutes greatly comforting Arthur. “Did you tell him or were any of the others there?” Hermione asked Harry who shook his head.

“If he knows now he will kill all of them so that they cannot speak. And it was empty.” Harry told her with a small smile.

“Did you ward the fireplace again?” she asked him, a hint of the old Hermione coming out for the first time since they came to The Burrow.

Harry nodded and taking a deep breath turned to the Weasleys. “I want an oath on your magic that you will never tell anyone what you see here and you will never reveal to anyone what has happened here by any means, magical or muggle. This is for your protection as well as mine, because the oath will protect your mind from being invaded by others or tortured for information.”

All the Weasleys including the hidden Weasley took that oath and in the dim light and their tension no one noticed that a swirl of magic that came from a dark corner of the room. Arthur Weasley had sworn for two reasons. One he need not tell his wife if it was very bad and the other he need not tell Dumbledore.

Harry then expertly started placing spells he should have not known including some dark spells and warding the fireplace as well. The others looked on at this Harry who seemed so competent and powerful as he cast spell after spell at the stairs and the fireplace and warded the room against eavesdroppers.

Harry removed the memories he had shown Snape and McGonagall and added the meeting with Arran and the Slytherins and placed it in the bowl. He took a deep breath and steadied himself.

“See,” he said looking intently at everyone, “I am showing you memories I have no right to show, but you called me family and are willing to listen me out against your brother and sister. I really don’t know why they are doing this, but I really have no choice but to keep myself away from them. I Harry Potter swear on my magic all that I am showing you is true.” And all the Weasleys watched as a golden swirl came out and circled him and went into him.

He tapped the pensieve and sat back, shaking slightly. This meant a lot more to him than he thought. They were family and he hoped he had done the right thing, as the Weasleys watched shocked and totally stunned the memories that played out starting from the letter from Fawkes and the Order meeting that took place after the Order meeting and watched bits and pieces of everything until the memory of Harry meeting Arran, Draco and the others, Harry’s interaction and their oaths and their pledge to fight against Voldemort.

He did not show them about the hunt of the horcruxes as Harry knew he would be chewed by Snape inside out for showing just this. If the Weasleys agreed to work with them and become a part of their team, then Snape or Arran could talk about the destroyed horcruxes.

There was a horrible silence as all the Weasleys tried to take in all that they had seen and at that time they could understood only one thing at the end of it all. Dumbledore was no better than Voldemort; Draco Malfoy was a better man than their brother and it was not Pansy who was the slut.

End of Chapter – 20

Chapter – 21

Arthur Weasley was shattered completely as he stood there in the darkness and struggled to come to terms with so many things. The first of it being the loss of his three children, the next being the betrayal of Dumbledore, the fact that Harry whom he and Molly had thought of their own child, was fighting a war that no adult should fight let alone a child of sixteen; and here he was fighting so courageously after being made to lose everyone who was close to him.

For Arthur Weasley knew that Dumbledore had made sure that Sirius would serve time in Azkaban and not be there for Harry. Merlin! Snape was a better man than all of those who were Harry's own people. He agreed to become a slave to save the child. Arthur knew what a master could ask of a slave and he shuddered as he thought that Snape was willing to become one to save Harry, willing to kill Voldemort the moment he tried to kill Harry.

Harry's people though were bent upon killing him, after of course robbing his money and making sure he killed Voldemort. Arthur was not even aware he was calling Voldemort by name; he was so immersed in his anger and sorrow. Ron and Ginny were friendly with Percy and were accepting money to betray their friend.

And what a friend Harry was! Did they forget that Ginny had a life debt to him for saving her in the Chamber of Secrets and Ron, Ginny and the whole family had a debt, Percy included unless he severed all magical connections with the Weasley name, towards Harry for saving their father and the head of their family from dying last year in the Department of Mysteries?

Ginny, Arthur was mortified as he thought of the job she had accepted from Dumbledore for ten thousand galleons. To become a..., his mind could not say the word whore as he blinked his eyes furiously wondering just where he and Molly had gone wrong?

Dumbledore, Arthur Weasley's lips curled as his face took on a ferocious expression that made him look quite strange; how *dare* he decide that Harry should die and Moody, who was he their Maker?

Then those who should surely die first should be Dumbledore, he thought angrily as he was the man with the most power.

He was very glad he had given his oath to Harry because he knew otherwise he would not have been able to keep this from Molly and this would have destroyed her. She was still upset about Percy and while that was acceptable as ambition, this was something entirely different.

He looked around the shocked faces of his sons and felt a tear running down his face as they tried to understand all that they had been shown about their family. His troubled mind was diverted by Harry clearing his throat and speaking softly. He had replaced all his memories into his head and had gone in the silence of the aftermath of the viewing to keep the pensieve back in the cottage he saw in the memories. That must have been the cottage Snape owned, he realized.

The silence was deafening and Harry was trembling slightly as he looked around at the shocked faces around him. "I am sorry guys. I really did not want to show you all this. I am very sorry about this. Please forgive me."

"Harry it is not us who should be forgiving you but you who should be forgiving us for the betrayal of my children." Arthur Weasley came away from the shadows and into the dim light and found six wands trained on him in horror and shock.

"*Obliv*," Harry started saying when Arthur hurriedly intervened, "I Arthur Weasley, swear on my magic to help Harry James Potter in his war against the Dark, Light, Order of the Phoenix and the Ministry and my own family if the need arises." A golden swirl of magic left Arthur and went straight to Harry who stood there absolutely gob smacked. Ron's brothers were one thing but his father?

Harry felt so humbled by the mild mannered man who ran his life on such strict principles that he was willing to give an oath to stand by those principles and realized the extent to which his last two children had hurt him. "I accept." Harry watched the magic go into him as he accepted the oath from Mr. Weasley.

Arthur Weasley came into the room and everyone saw the tear tracks on his cheeks with horror. "I am so sorry." Harry told him very inadequately as he looked in dismay at the tears that still continued to come down his from his eyes.

"Why Harry? Sorry that Dumbledore wants you dead? Or are you sorry that the Weasleys have finally acted true to the name of blood traitors, blood traitors to the boy to whom we owe two life debts? Or that the so called Order of the Phoenix and its Head only want your money and life and not your happiness Harry?"

Arthur Weasley sank into a sofa and put his head into his hands and there was only silence as everyone stood around him. After some time he slowly lifted his head.

"Sirius was so right. He was forever demanding that you be given more information and to my eternal shame I am afraid I did not agree with him. In fact no one did except Severus. Harry," Arthur looked at him before continuing very sadly, "Molly and I joined the Order to do our bit in helping Dumbledore and by extension you to bring down the evil that is threatening to annihilate our world and by doing so, we thought we would provide a better world for our children. But now I find that the side I am fighting for is not very different from the side I am fighting against and that shames me."

To the horror of everyone Arthur Weasley broke down and cried like a child. All of them looked at each other in dismay as they stood close to him but not saying a word as they really did not know what to say that would comfort him. A long time later he lifted his head and looked straight at Harry.

"Molly lost her two brothers in the first war Harry. Fred and George are named for them, you know. I lost my parents who fought in the Order alongside Dumbledore. Your parents and so many others like Dorocas Meadows were killed because they thought they were giving up their lives so that so many others would live and live a life of integrity and upstanding honesty, and safety and security. But when our side is capable of such horrible actions I cannot help but feel they have died in vain, all of them."

They sat around for a long time and then someone cleared their throat. Harry and the others looked up to see Fred whose face wore an ugly look before he turned to his father and spoke gently. "Dad I don't understand why you have to feel so bad. As that death eater Arran said, I vote we show all of these people a good many things." He turned to Harry, "I think all of us should meet with each other Harry. Can you arrange for it? During these holidays if we can?"

Harry nodded, "I have one more shopping trip that I can request. But Moody must not be there. If Mr. Weasley can come as an escort along with McGonagall and Severus, then we can meet at your flat. Is it well warded, especially against Moody's eye?"

"Not to worry. I can take care of all that. Dad will arrange for coming along with you and Hermione and you tell the others to meet us there on the day you come to Diagon Alley for shopping. All right?" Bill said continuing, "Now we must go to bed and both of you leave for Hogwarts as planned in the morning and we will try and meet within this week. That will give us the time to take all this in and plan further."

Arthur had not said a word and Harry saw the sorrow and the betrayal in their eyes as they went to their beds, Bill helping his father who leaned heavily on his eldest son for more than just physical support. None of them would sleep tonight, he knew and frankly he knew he would not sleep at all. The next morning Harry who had been tossing and turning, got up at about six, they had gone to bed only at three and went down to find all the Weasleys except Ron sitting at the table, sipping at their tea.

"Harry, you too have got up early, come on dear, have a cup." Molly told him cheerfully and placed a steaming cup of coffee as he sat next to Mr. Weasley who smiled tiredly at him.

Harry sipped his tea silently as did the others who were looking very glum. Molly looked sharply at all of them and then, "Arthur what is the matter? Is there a problem at work?"

"No Molly I am simply very tired, that is all. Harry when do you have to go?"

“Dad let Harry stay on for some more time, please.” Ginny begged him. Arthur scowled as Harry flushed but Charlie intervened before his father could say something he would surely regret later, “Harry you must make sure that those Slytherins who got Ron and Ginny must be punished okay? You have got a large carton from Gred and Forge haven’t you?”

Harry nodded his head as Molly looked at all her sons and daughter and the boy who was her very own in every way possible. There was something very wrong here and she was going to find out. Outwardly, though she said nothing, deciding to tackle her husband first. If she was not mistaken he was going to snap at Ginny for her request that Harry stay on. That was not like Arthur and she was worried.

All of them had their tea and then Harry went up to wake up Ron and chatting for sometime with him about Quidditch and the Chudley Cannons, both of them came down and Ron grinned at Hermione who smiled back at Ron. All of them chatted until breakfast and Arthur and the other Weasley marveled at the way Harry was controlling his emotions and behaving as if everything was all right.

Molly saw Harry and Ron chatting and she smiled. So there was nothing wrong there. Maybe Arthur did not like Ginny throwing herself at Harry when he was clearly not interested. Yes, that would be it Molly thought. Well, she would speak to Ginny about it before she left for Hogwarts, she decided as she cooked a mouth watering breakfast for all of them. Hermione and Ginny helped her and after breakfast Harry took his dishes to the sink and helped her clean up and then got ready to leave.

“Sure you can’t stay Harry?” Ron asked him, “No Ron, I think this time I will leave and give you the space to simply rest. I think that will be for the best.”

“It will be restful if you are there Harry. Come on see even Ron says so. Stay. Pleeaseeee.” Ginny pouted as he fluttered her eyes at Harry, who looked exceedingly uncomfortable and shook his head. “No Ginny I think it will be better if I leave. Come on Hermione. Bye Mrs. Weasley, Mr. Weasley, thanks a lot for a lovely lunch yesterday,” Harry looked straight at Mr. Weasley, “Thanks for everything.”

He smiled wryly at Harry. "I must thank you Harry. Your gift was wonderful." Harry flushed for a second as he looked at Mr. Weasley's sad face. He really did not know what to say. "I feel a bit unwell Molly. I wish to lie down today. I will not be going to work today. Bye Harry I will see you later." and he turned and left the room making Molly hurriedly say a 'goodbye and take care Harry, Hermione' and run after her husband.

"Ron, I think you are beginning to get spots on your face. Come on off to bed," Bill said suddenly out of the blue and dragged Ron to his room looking meaningfully at Charlie who blinked and dragged Ginny not minding her protests straight to her room and placed a sleeping charm on her as Bill did on Ron and came down at the same time as Charlie.

"Are you thinking the same as I am?" Charlie asked Bill. He nodded and turned to Harry. "Harry can you ask Snape and the others to meet us at the Twins place today, now? Mum will be with dad and Ron and Ginny are asleep. I don't think we will get a better chance to meet in secret. Dad can meet with Snape and McGonagall later. What do you say?"

Harry nodded. It was still early and Dumbledore would think he was here. 'Fine can all of us floo to your place from here?' the Twins nodded. Harry activated his earring so that everyone could hear and spoke into it.

"Sev are you there?" the Weasleys looked at each other. It was so strange to see Harry calling Snape of all people by his name.

"Harry you are back at Hogwarts already? Albus was saying something about young Ron and younger Ginny keeping you there until lunch at the very least?" Snape's voice oozed with sarcasm and distaste. Harry grinned as did Hermione and there were other chuckles from Draco and the others who were listening as well.

"Okay Sev all of that later, now I want all of you to meet me at a place in Diagon Alley. Are all of you listening?" when he got a chorus of yes and whys, "Okay Sev, some of the Weasleys know about us." There was a sudden silence before Draco broke it, "What do you mean

Harry? Know about us?" he asked in alarm. Snape was silent as was McGonagall.

"I have all their oaths on their life and magic and they want to meet you. Ron and Ginny and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley are otherwise occupied and this is the best chance for all of us to meet before School starts. The Twins flat over their shop is adequately warded and the Twins will be going first along with Bill to ward it against Moody's eye and also ward the floo against anyone flooing while we are there. They want to talk with you Sev, Arran, and I think it will be for the best if we meet when Dumbledore is not suspicious."

Snape recovered first. "We will meet in half an hour. All right?" he asked the others and when they replied in the affirmative, he spoke to Harry, "Ask the Twins to go first with Bill and ward the place Harry. Then you go and secure it completely. How will we come inside?"

Harry relayed the question to the Twins who told them to floo and gave them a new password, saying that they will change the floo password for the duration of the meeting so that no one will be able to floo in apart from them.

Harry deactivated his earring as Bill went up to his parents room to say they will be going for a walk before Harry and Hermione would leave. Molly was so worried about her husband that she agreed at once and so Bill came down and flood with the Twins to their apartment that was over their shop and casting many spells, reset the floo password and also warded the place thoroughly.

The fifth minute Snape was there glaring at all three of them and then he turned and started checking the whole place for any other presence. McGonagall flood in next and then as Snape spoke in low tones with her, Draco Malfoy, Pansy, Blaise, Arran and Ria flood in and then Harry, Hermione and Charlie joined them and Harry told Snape what had happened. All the Weasleys were struck at the resemblance Arran had with Sirius.

Then their attention was turned to a yelling Snape had caught hold of Harry's arm and had pulled him roughly to him and he stood there glaring at Harry for a whole minute before he started, shouting at

Harry's irresponsibility for not checking the room for any other persons before showing the memories.

Harry knew Snape would be displeased but as he had got the oaths he had thought Snape would glare at him, say a few choice words and let it be. Snape though had other ideas and he had been petrified when Harry had told him about the Weasleys and after he had come to the Twins flat to know that Arthur had been there concealed had terrified him as that could have easily been Ron or Ginny.

"How dare you?" Snape bellowed and did not stop even when Harry flinched in shame and fear.

Snape let him self go and then wound up by hissing "How could you Harry? What if Arthur was Albus's man? What would you have done? All our efforts would have gone down the drain." Harry looked down in shame as the others stood still watching the two as Snape ranted on and on as if unable to stop. Harry to the shock of the Weasleys stood there and took all that Snape was yelling without a word in defense.

Surprisingly it was Arran who came to the rescue. "Come on Severus, calm down. Harry will be more careful in future won't you my poor baby?" he cooed wanting to break the tension and Harry looked up at him his eyes reflecting his emotions. He shook his head at Arran's attempt to calm Snape and then turned to him.

"I never thought of that Sev. Honest. I am so sorry. I will never do anything like this ever again. Sorry guys. I am so sorry." He looked down in shame as Snape finally calmed down and sighed. He went to Harry and pulled him close and briefly hugged him. Harry smiled hesitantly at him his apology shining in his eyes begging for forgiveness and Snape smiled back reluctantly. Harry looked at the others, an apology in his face and looked relieved when they grinned back at him.

"He was very quick Snape. He shouted an *obliviate* and my dad would have lost all his memories if he hadn't rushed forward to give his oath to Harry." Charlie told him. He and the other Weasleys were still in a state of shock after seeing Snape yell and then hug Harry.

“That was because your father was a decent enough man who wanted to side with the truth. What if someone had seen all this and walked away with the knowledge. It is not the lives that would be in danger that I am worried about Weasley, but the fact that the goal all of us are fighting for would have perished.” Snape retorted. “All of us here are aware that we may die at any time. That was not the issue.”

Charlie nodded in agreement and then McGonagall stepped forward with the introductions and there was an awkward moment when Draco, Pansy and Blaise shook hands with the Weasleys. But Bill, and following his example the others were only pleasant and then Bill and the other Weasleys started asking questions.

They had sat down as there were not enough chairs and Charlie had shrunk all of them at Harry’s suggestion. Harry was sitting by Snape and was holding on to him, his face still showing his shame at his carelessness. Snape was speaking very softly and gently to Harry who was nodding now and then and the Weasley brothers were stunned at this side of their potions master that they were not privileged to see until now.

After sometime Arran cleared his throat and looked at the Weasleys, “What do you want to know?” Arran asked him politely.

“Well nothing now except that we wanted to meet. We have had too many things that we learnt last night that need to sink in a bit and we need a little time to accept certain facts.” Bill told him, meaning the betrayal of his brothers and sister and all the others were quiet as they knew only too well how the betrayal of a family member would hurt.

“We wanted to meet all of you so that it would make all that we saw real. Harry would not be able to come once School starts and since Harry is the connection between all of us we thought we should meet all of you the first time with Harry present. We were fortunate the opportunity presented itself today instead of later in the week that we had originally planned. Of course, professor, when you go hunting all of us want in.” Bill said with a sad smile.

There was a short silence and then, “What will you do if your brothers and sister are doing much more than what we know they are doing at

present? Where will all of you be on that?" Draco asked him the most important question.

Bill sighed as he understood the implications behind the carefully worded question. He looked around at his brothers for a long moment and turned to Draco Malfoy. "We will be where you all are on your people, if Ron, Ginny and Percy are more than what they seem to be today. If they have," Bill swallowed hard and flushed in shame, "have taken only money to do as Dumbledore says then we will consult all of you and request you to allow us, I mean the family to deal with them as we see it fit. Is that fine?"

"That is terrific." Arran said breaking the ice and smiling at him and Draco and the others nodded their heads as well.

The Weasleys nodded relieved. "Our mother doesn't know about all this. So if they are taking only money, not that the offence is fine or approved but I suppose it is better then finding out they have the mark on their hands and are willing servants of You-Know-Who or are willing to kill innocents on Dumbledore's behalf, then I hope you will allow us to deal with them privately so that our mother never comes to know of the betrayal to Harry to whom all of us owe two life debts and who is also family. It would destroy her." Charlie's voice was shaking as he finished and he looked down waiting for their answers.

"Of course, Charlie, we all may call each other by our given names may we not?" at all the nods, Arran who had spoken continued smiling at all of them and all of them were struck at how he looked like Sirius at that moment. "We are not here to break families or destroy hopes. We are gathered here to save ourselves and the world we are living in from evil maniacs and manipulating jack assess. But if they are joining with the evil we all are fighting against, we will deal with them in the same way we will deal with any other."

The Weasleys nodded and from there they descended into a discussion that the Weasleys gradually participated and slowly the thick atmosphere was broken down and a slight level of understanding had been established. Both parties had Harry in common and he was their bridge and the point where they met and there they had no problems or anything and all of them were very

careful to stay on that path, never swerving from that and into personalities.

The Twins were subdued as well speaking seriously and they came forward first and volunteered to keep an eye on Diagon Alley for them. So the first spy center for this new group was established at the Twins shop and Snape and Arran wasted no time and started warding and placing high security spells all over the place, giving Harry a lecture as they did it and the others watched with fascination as spell after spell was chanted and locked into place.

Bill was amazed with the cooperation and the hand offered by the goblins and he also promised to do as much as he could as did Charlie.

All too soon it was time for Harry and Hermione to leave and they left reluctantly for The Burrow and from there flood into Hogwarts in time for lunch. The Headmaster's office was empty and Harry and Hermione wasted no time there and left for the Great Hall. They found Dumbledore there but no Snape and McGonagall who were still at the Twins flat deep in discussions.

They had a full lunch and Harry wondered when he would have the time to speak to all of them about issues that went very deep with him. The war that had already begun as the death eater activity had started mounting in the holidays would be over at one point or the other. But what would happen afterward was the most worrying thing that all of them used to discuss all the time at the cottage.

Harry had been seeking some answers and he had decided that as he had the money and the resources and now the Weasleys as well he should start off on his schemes as soon as possible so that by the time the war was in full swing, things that Harry and the others would set in place would help the Wizarding World a little at least.

As both of them prepared to leave, Dumbledore asked them about the Weasleys. "Well Harry, Miss Granger, how was your visit?"

"Great Sir!" Harry smiled at him, "But Ron and Ginny are still recovering from all these things and so we left them and came over." Dumbledore smiled at them and Harry got up followed by Hermione.

As they went out Harry spoke quite clearly, "Come on Hermione. We can go to the Room of Requirement and start looking into that horrible assignment Snape has given us as well as those for runes."

"Harry I can tell you about the runes, but yes the room will help us with the potions assignment." Hermione said as they turned away to go to the seventh floor. They were not disturbed and Harry took out the used book on ancient magic he had purchased from Flourish and Blotts and Hermione with Harry's gifts and both settled down for some heavy studying.

Harry's shopping trip never came to pass as both Snape and McGonagall who returned very late that day, though at different times looking very satisfied told him it was not advisable. Harry agreed but felt very restricted and was most envious of their freedom, in fact of anybody's freedom to go anywhere as they pleased. Except him, he grumbled to Snape.

Snape was very sympathetic and he pacified Harry by bringing him up to date about what had happened after Harry and Hermione had left the Twins flat and Harry dutifully told Hermione everything.

Arthur Weasley had come in the afternoon and had met with everyone. He seemed very troubled and sad but as Snape said he had to face the fact that three of his children were not looking at things his and Mrs. Weasley's way. It would take a lot of time if not the rest of his life before Arthur Weasley could accept this level of betrayal from his last three children.

The rest of the holidays passed by very fast and Harry was now getting a hang on all the subjects he was studying both School and otherwise. School began and Ron and Ginny came back extremely jumpy and nervous and many students took great pleasure in scaring them by shouting loudly from behind them. That never failed to make them jump and squeal and run.

Ron was now eating off Harry's, Hermione's and Neville's plates and Ginny was doing the same with her friends so that they would not be pranked. The stuffing had gone out of Ron and he was not the brash boy he had been. The embarrassment he suffered made him very quiet and unobtrusive and Harry decided he preferred this Ron far

better as Ron was content to sit in the library with all of them. He felt safer that way. Ginny too came along and studied with Luna.

The other thing the pranks had accomplished though that was not the intention was that Ron stopped looking at Hermione in any way other than a friend and someone who would help him with his homework. He still shuddered and had nightmares about his heavy chest and the pinches and squeezes he had received and for the moment to even think of any girl was horrifying to him. So he backed off trying to impress Hermione and make her somehow to go out with him. That made Harry very happy.

Ginny though was not disturbed by her change into the other sex as she was not mauled like Ron. While she found the experience very mortifying, she still had her goal to seduce Harry well within sight. Only Harry was never alone. He was always with 'The Gang' and Ginny found it very difficult to seduce him or flutter her eyelashes in the presence of so many persons. She bit her lip and waited impatiently for a chance. She was seeing Dean Thomas secretly on the sly in the meantime and went out with him in secret as Harry was a job and Dean was pleasure.

The days and weeks rolled by and Hogwarts were as normal as ever though the outside world was not so lucky. Everyday muggles were killed here and there and the first big blow came around the first week of February a day before the most awaited Quidditch match of the year, Slytherin vs. Gryffindor. Tension was riding high and Harry as the seeker and also the Quidditch Captain was having butterflies in his stomach as did Draco Malfoy who was the Slytherin Captain.

Most of the students were at the Great Hall having breakfast when the owls swooped in with the Daily Prophet and other mail. Harry unrolled his copy that he had started subscribing since School started as did Hermione and could not stop a small gasp of horror as he saw the headlines, ***“Dementors Leave Azkaban!”*** in bold letters and below ***“Dementors Join He Who Must Not Be Named”*** and totally terrifying the Wizarding World.

Hermione exclaimed as well and Ron who pulled his copy from his hands was really frightened. "Bloody hell Harry, *he* has got the dementors on his side." Harry and indeed everyone who had taken out a subscription for The Daily Prophet was shocked at the news headline and there were many gasps and stifled shrieks that was heard in the Great Hall that day. Harry pulled back the paper from Ron and read the account below highly disturbed at the headlines.

The Wizarding Prison Azkaban is now no longer guarded by dementors who have left the prison unguarded and joined forces with You-Know-Who. This has alarmed the Ministry and indeed all of us who are aware of the implications. The Ministry has sent guards at once to the prison so that You-Know-Who will not attack and remove all the death eaters and others whom he may kill and use as inferi.

There are over eighty prisoners there and now about twelve aurors have been dispatched to guard the Azkaban fortress. Unspeakables were also sent to add additional wards and protections around and inside the prison. The Ministry is asking all people not to worry and to remain calm and fully alert and urges the people to learn the Patronus charm that can dispel the dementors.

Harry snorted as he read that account that went on to tell a short history of Azkaban and also mentioned that only one prisoner had been able to escape and that had been Sirius Black.

"Remain calm? How can you when you don't know when the dementors will come around and suck your soul? And what about people who cannot perform the patronus charm or squibs and muggles?" he asked angrily glancing up at the staff table. The mood there was solemn as all the teachers looked as horrified as the students, who had already started worrying about their families.

Snape was glaring at everyone and as he looked at Harry he scowled and got up excusing himself and leaving the Great Hall as did Dumbledore and McGonagall.

Harry knew negotiations had been going on with the dementors but apparently they had been finalized and the dementors had left the prison to start sucking souls of innocent muggles, squibs, witches and wizards.

“How horrible Harry.” Hermione told him. “How can we ward every one against the dementors? Every muggle, squib or wizard would be near impossible.”

Harry nodded his head. “He could do so much damage with the dementors on his side. Hermione are your parents’ place warded against dementors?” he asked her as she gasped in horror as she understood what he was asking her. She stood up immediately to go to Dumbledore to request it when Harry pulled her down.

“Not now Hermione, later. If you do it in the Great Hall, then you will be giving ideas to the death eater children here.” He warned.

“Yeah, Malfoy would probably run off to his father with this. What Harry says makes a lot of sense.” Dean looked very troubled as did Hermione and in fact so did all the others. Harry finished his breakfast in haste and went along with Hermione, Dean and a few other muggleborns to Dumbledore’s office.

On their way out Harry had gone to the Hufflepuff and the Ravenclaw tables and had spoken to Hannah Abbot and Susan Bones and Luna, and as a result two minutes later more muggleborns from the Hufflepuff and the Ravenclaw table followed the Gryffindors who were already walking swiftly to the Headmaster’s office.

Dumbledore was there with Snape, Flitwick and McGonagall and seemed to be deep in discussion. The Daily Prophet was on the table in front of Dumbledore. Snape was sneering at all of them gathered there and before he could open his mouth and say something scathing, Dumbledore spoke asking them what the matter was.

“Well, Harry, Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley, you have come with a large contingent of people. What is the matter?”

Hermione who acted spokesperson for all of them answered Dumbledore’s kind query.

“Sir The Daily Prophet has said that You-Know-Who has the dementors on his side.” Hermione started and as Dumbledore nodded his head, “Most of us here are muggleborns and others who are firmly against You-Know-Who. So we were wondering if you

could help us to ward out homes against dementors as our parents and families would be helpless against them if they are attacked while we are at School.”

Dumbledore looked thoughtful, contemplating just how he would accomplish that. “That is a very good idea Miss. Granger. There are sixty muggleborn and a hundred and twelve half – blood children right now in Hogwarts.”

McGonagall interrupted his musings, “We should ward the muggleborns homes first Albus and then go to the half – bloods. It would take about ten days but I think we could get it done.”

Albus nodded and looked at them and smiled, “That was a very fine idea. Thank you Miss Granger as it would make all the students here at Hogwarts more relieved. Now,” he sighed heavily his twinkle all but vanished, “if only we could find a way to protect the muggles as well. Ah! Well, we cannot have everything. I will have this done. You students need not worry.”

Deeply relieved Hermione, Harry and the others left the Headmaster’s office to proceed to their classes, which happened to be potions for Harry and Hermione with the Slytherins.

The Slytherins were already at the doors that were closed as Snape was still with Dumbledore. As they saw Harry and the others coming Draco sniggered loudly and turned to Pansy and Bulstrode, “Look the mudblood and the half blood. Why Potty, scared that the dementors will suck your soul?”

Bulstrode laughed, “Draco! Potter has a soul? I thought the way he looks his soul was already sucked off.”

Harry who was still very worried about the implications of the dementors actually joining with Voldemort, lifted his wand and was about to curse Bulstrode who had her wand in front of her as did Draco and Pansy when Snape came striding swiftly his robes billowing behind him.

“May I know what is happening here?” he asked glaring at all of them. “Ten points from Gryffindor Potter, Granger for fighting.”

"But I didn't." Harry's protests were lost as Snape opened the doors with a bang. "You had your wands in your hands ready for fighting." Harry scowled at that and looked at the others who had apparently put their wands into their sleeves the moment Snape had come. Gritting his teeth angrily in a show of hate towards the Slytherins and Snape, Harry sighed inside and walked to his place near Pansy who was smirking at him.

Every potions class would result in five additional points for Slytherin as Snape would comment on the perfect potion that Harry and Pansy would turn in and say deprecatingly that Slytherin would get five points because Pansy had helped him to make a perfect potion. Harry had tried everything with Snape and still the man took too much delight in deducting points.

His view would be that he had to maintain outward appearances in hating Harry Potter. Harry had huffed and puffed, snorted and tried pearls of sarcasm that only resulted in soft laughter and teasing. After a month Harry had left it as a bad job and resigned himself to expecting points to be awarded to Slytherin every potions class.

Today was no different and Harry sighed as Slytherin points went up by five and he packed his bags and left the potions lab, Snape smirking but his eyes showing genuine amusement as he looked at the boy he had come to love as his own. They had Transfiguration next and after that were runes before lunch.

After Transfiguration, which was eventless and slightly boring as they were studying bones alignment in human Transfiguration, Harry went up to his runes class with Hermione. Ron had been removed from this class because of almost no assignments handed in and very poor grades for the rare ones he had turned in. Harry was feeling very relieved as this was one more time he need not put up a pretense of being friendly with Ron.

Neville whose grandmother had agreed to his runes classes, was there sitting with Harry and Hermione as he had slightly more than average grades in runes, the result of hard studying with Harry and Hermione. He had become firm friends with both and was fast losing

his shyness and was on the way to building up an impressive character.

It was he who gave the idea of teaching the Patronus Charm to everyone. They had finished with the morning classes and the talk all around them as they walked to the Great Hall was the news in The Daily Prophet that morning.

“Harry, can I ask you something?” Neville said as he slung his bag behind him and walked down the stairs.

“Sure Neville. what is it?” Harry asked him with a smile.

“I was just wondering you know, while warding your homes is fine, but when you do come face to face with a dementor,” he shuddered as did Harry, who knew how terrible it could be to come to face with one. That train of thought took him straight to Sirius and his third year and Harry shook his head as if to shake away those thoughts and turned with a strained smile to Neville who was saying something more.

“Sorry Neville I did not get what you were saying.” Harry told him apologetically and Neville smiled before saying what he had once again. “When you come face to face with one then what? I mean you can’t be at home all the while. What if you get caught outside?”

Harry frowned as he tried to understand what Neville was saying. “What can we do about it Nev?”

“Why Harry, we can teach the Patronus Charm to everyone who wants to learn, same as last year when we learnt it in the DA.” Neville told him as they entered the Great Hall.

“That is a brilliant idea Neville.” Hermione exclaimed making him smile and blush slightly. “What we can do is make a list of all those who can cast a corporeal Patronus and take groups of ten or so and start teaching them. Say half an hour everyday.” She told him excited.

Neville nodded as they sat down. Ron was already there and soon all of them were discussing the ways to teach the Patronus charm. “I think that is a brilliant idea Harry.” Ron congratulated him as did

Ginny, "That was quick thinking Harry. It would be so useful for everyone."

Harry suppressed his anger and irritation at the blatantly false praise and smiled at Ron. Ginny he did not even look at, a fact that made her face redden in anger. "Hey it was not my idea. It was Neville's. He is the one who deserves the praise for his thoughtful thinking about others." Ron went red and before he could say anything Seamus shouted.

"Hear, hear. Three cheers to our one and only Neville." everyone laughed and Neville grinned along with them shaking his head and muttering about silly asses to Harry who just laughed.

Harry went off to his practice session before the all important match the next day and Neville and Hermione along with Hannah Abbot, Susan Bones, Luna, Michael Corner, Zacharias Smith, Dean, Seamus, Lavender, Padma and Parvati Patil, Ginny started making lists. Ron was with Harry and they assigned Harry's and Ron's groups as well.

Then Hermione sent off the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs to bring all those who wanted to learn the Patronus charm to the seventh floor after dinner. Harry and Ron had come back as well and after dinner each of the original DA members who could cast a corporeal Patronus taught a small group.

Neville who had practiced during the holidays as he was living in a warded home that would enable him to do magic was able to cast a corporeal Patronus and so were Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Ron, Luna, Dean, Parvati, Padma, Hannah, Susan and Zacharias Smith.

Each of them took a small group of almost the entire School minus the Slytherins who had come to learn and for the next two hours instead of the original half hour they had planned before they left for their dorms to sleep, they stood in the expanded Room of Requirement casting the Patronus Charm.

End of Chapter – 21

Chapter – 22

The next morning Harry got up nice and early and a bit nervous about the match of the season with the Slytherins. As he washed and changed into his robes, he peeped out of the window and found the day very cloudy with dark skies and extremely chilly.

Ron was even more nervous than Harry as he had the added worry that someone might prank him as he was keeping. Harry laughed inside and wished that he could tell Ron that Snape would not do a thing like that but as that was out of the question, he contented himself by comforting Ron as best as he could.

“Ron, Dumbledore would grant us victory if the Slytherins would try something during the game. So not to worry, nothing untoward will happen.” He said as they were entering the Great Hall.

Snape was not there and as Harry looked around he saw Draco, Pansy and Blaise looking very worried and his eyes clouded with worry. What had happened and Nott and Bulstrode were pensive as well increasing the foreboding that there was definitely wrong.

He was distracted by Ron who was not touching anything in front of him incase the food would turn him into something or do something that would affect his game. “Harry can you see if my plate does not have stuff in it?” he asked looking longingly at the breakfast laid so appetizingly around him.

Harry obediently ate a little of everything Ron wanted to have, his mind on Snape and the disturbed Slytherins in front of him. He let his eyes rove over the Hall and glanced up at the staff table and found that Dumbledore and McGonagall were having a serious discussion their expressions solemn.

That was when he heard a cough and felt his earring activate and held his breath. Then he heard Snape saying, “Master if I may suggest something?”

And then he heard Voldemort speak, "What is it Severus?" in a very irritated tone and Harry almost passed out with worry. It was with great difficulty that he continued to put something into his mouth and chew slowly so that everyone would attribute it to his nervousness before the game with Slytherin.

"Master today is a game against Slytherin. Gryffindor vs. Slytherin. If the dementors were to attack, many of ours will also get hit in the cross fire because the Slytherin House will be there in full force. We have not warned any of our children against the attack. If I may suggest Master, could we ensure the dementors do not to attack those in Slytherin robe, by the process of a few of us traveling along with the dementors in appropriate disguise to guide them?"

"You will not go Severus, not until today evening." Voldemort said flatly to him even as he considered Snape's words and their wisdom. What Snape said made a lot of sense, only Voldemort was not going to take any chances and let Snape go. Today he would be successful and he had already told the dementors to bring Harry Potter alive.

On that there was no compromise. He, Voldemort would kill the bloody Boy-who-bloody-Lived. Now he walked up and down thinking about what Snape had just said. It really made a lot of sense as he would not lose just Slytherins, he did not care about that. He would lose his death eaters and his followers without reason.

"I would not want to Master. In fact I was going to request I stay here as then I can tell the old fool that My Lord wanted me next to him and so there was no way I could warn him." Voldemort looked at Snape for a long moment, finally believing what he said by a sharp nod.

"Be with me Severus and I shall ask Mulciber, Blackthorn and Runcifer along with a few new recruits to go with the dementors and control them so that they would not suck indiscriminately."

"Yes Master." Snape said humbly and then conversation stopped. Harry sat there horrified at what he had heard. Merlin! Dementors were going to attack Hogwarts today during the game and suck the souls of as many students as possible and capture him alive as well.

He could not go to Dumbledore with this Harry knew; because if Dumbledore took action then Voldemort would think Harry could still connect to him through the scar and he might try and reopen the link. That Harry wanted to avoid at all cost.

Which meant he had to think of a way to get along with the game looking as normal as ever and at the same time make sure the dementors did not succeed. Harry thought furiously for a few minutes and then he stood up as if he was too nervous to eat his breakfast fully.

“Just a minute guys, I need the bathroom. I will meet you here in two minutes.” Looking at Hermione for a second Harry walked out swiftly and activated his earring on his run to the bathroom, where he cast a privacy spell and a spy spell incase Dumbledore came after him and quickly told everyone what he had heard from Snape.

He heard a relieved sigh that looked as if it came from Snape and Harry on a sudden whim, “Sev you are hearing aren’t you? Is this what you wanted to say?”

He heard Snape clearing his throat and a small hmm that sounded like agreement.

“Okay. Professor McGonagall and Hermione, I want you both to get all those who can cast the Patronus Charm and be ready. Make sure that you will be able to take the students safely inside at the first hint of trouble. Professor is that fine?” Harry asked her anxiously not bothered he was ordering her as he knew she would not mistake him. They had gone past all that by now.

McGonagall was in the privacy of her office, she had got up when she saw Harry leaving and had hurried to her office and she spoke very briskly. “I just got here Harry. Severus was called away early morning. The mark burned to call everyone and that is why Draco and the others are worried. They have received no other information and as they cannot leave they are terrified.

“Hermione, Draco and the others must make the younger ones sit on the lower benches so that they can get away quickly. Hermione, will you speak to Neville, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot?”

Listening to Hermione's hmm of agreement McGonagall went on. "All those who can perform the Patronus Charm sit in the higher benches as Harry rightly said. Harry you will tell everyone that this weather feels just the same way when dementors attacked you and Dudley at your home. Speak loudly and Draco will catch on from there. Okay? Now get back Harry. You have been here long enough."

Harry cancelled his privacy spells and ran back to the Great Hall and McGonagall who was monitoring Harry's position told Draco and Hermione to start walking towards the entrance as Harry came there so that the planned conversation could take place.

"Hermione come here." Harry hurriedly pulled her to one side, apparently not noticing the Slytherins who had walked out. Draco signaled everyone to stop and placed a discreet hearing spell that Nott and Bulstrode not to mention Blaise and Pansy were smiling at him in approval at the cunning Draco displayed and Crabbe and Goyle came out too, standing there shuffling their feet as usual.

Harry did not notice anyone as he was in a hurry to get to his Quidditch team, when Ron and Ginny came out and scowled as one when they saw the Slytherins standing there talking to each other in low tones.

"Harry the slimy gits are here. Why are you standing here mate. They may try something on you." Ron asked him.

Harry pulled him closer and as Ginny came along too, Harry seemed to be very distracted and not notice her, a fact that made her narrow her eyes and glare at Harry. Harry however was having important things on his mind to even look her frowning face.

"Ron, Hermione this is the same way the cold started when the dementors came to my aunt's place last year. Only yesterday we read that Voldemort had the dementors on his side and today the weather is so cold and cloudy and I am feeling kind of sick and remembering a lot of horrible things."

"I am too Harry. Oh Merlin! Don't tell me the dementors are here. There will be so many students Harry. Not all of them can cast the Patronus charm against them as that alone will drive them away."

What do we do?" Hermione was desperate as she looked at Harry with worry.

"I think it was a great thing that we practiced yesterday Hermione. What I suggest is that you, Neville, Hannah and Susan gather all those who can cast the Patronus properly and seat them in the front seats. Make the first to third years sit in the lower stands as then if the dementors do really come we can get them away to safety. I have to go. I wish there is some way to tell the Slytherins too. They would also be affected as we will be."

"Let the slimy gits die Harry. Why do you care about them?" Ron asked him baffled as to why Harry should be speaking for the Slytherins safety. "It is their master who has ordered this attack if it will happen and he has probably told all his death eaters to be safe."

"I hope Voldemort has told them to be safe. I hope it is only the cold, but how can you say just because they are in Slytherin they must die. Then we are not so different from them are we?" Harry asked him angrily.

"What? Why?" Ron asked equally angrily. "Have you forgotten what they did to me and Ginny? And the way Malfoy and the others treat you?"

"That is what Voldemort says Ron. They are not pure bloods, kill them. They are not worthy of me. Kill them. Even today, in Slytherin there must be so many death eater children and so many death eaters who have not gone back to the dungeons or aware of anything as all of them have already gone to the pitch for the game. Voldemort does not care about them dying and having their souls sucked. We cannot be like that Ron. I cannot, at least."

"You are mad Harry. Really, and you talk of dementors coming because it is cloudy and cold. We are in February Harry and I am not sure about dementors coming as the cold and cloud in February is always there. What is shocking is you want to save the bloody Slytherins who tried to kill you, do you remember? Something's wrong with you mate."

"I want to save everybody Ron. Yeah I may be wrong, but this is exactly the way it was before the dementors came to my aunt's place and where Voldemort's concerned I would rather be safe and be seen as silly and ridiculous rather than cocksure and have my soul sucked out."

Harry tried to walk away when Ron pulled him back shouting, "Hey! You cannot walk away like that. Just because you have stupid feelings about dementors that do not mean the dementors are coming. You have your brains addled and,"

"Shut up." Harry hissed at him. "You don't want to believe, fine." Harry turned and stormed away right into the hands of the Slytherins who looked at him impassively.

Harry stopped as if in shock for a moment and then he rapidly spoke, "I am sure you must have heard about my brains addling. But there is the cold and the small sense of fear that feels exactly the same as it did before the dementors come. If you want to protect your selves, well go ahead. The charm against the dementors is the Patronus charm, the spell is *Expecto Patronum*." And without saying a word more Harry ran to the Quidditch pitch.

Ron glared at him hatred on his face a fact all the Slytherins, Ginny and Hermione noticed. Ginny nudged Ron and he calmed down visibly and looked at Hermione and went red. She was however glaring at him and then turning on her heel ran back into the Great Hall.

The Slytherins too looked thoughtfully at each other and then nodding once at each other went straight to the Quidditch pitch. There they carefully sat the younger ones in the lower stands and the sixth and seventh years in the upper stands. There were many grumbles about it but on the whole most of the younger students obeyed.

Hermione, Neville, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Seamus, Luna and almost all of the DA went on alert when they heard Harry's feelings. Hermione had been very blunt and the fact Harry had experienced something like this before made all of them obey Hermione, who took charge.

Soon they had arranged everyone in order and Hermione was being very open about what Harry had felt about the chills and the cold cloudy day telling the younger ones who had been dull throughout the morning about the dementors that left Azkaban yesterday to join Voldemort. The first and second years attributed that dullness with the dementors and were very frightened and had obeyed Hermione without an argument. Soon she had a satisfactory arrangement in the Gryffindor stands and she looked over and saw the same state in the Hufflepuff stands.

Ravenclaw was a different matter as everyone laughed at Luna and Hermione went down and went to the Ravenclaw stands and glared at all of them and dragged Luna away from there shouting at them. "Harry is feeling cold and dull feeling that is out there the same way as he felt before two dementors attacked him in his aunt's place. We are taking precautions. If you want to get your soul sucked off be my guest." She walked away feeling angry for Luna who walked silently with her.

"Thank you." She told Hermione when they reached the Gryffindor stands. "Harry would have done this for me. You did too." She told Hermione with an amazing clarity for Luna and Hermione stood there uncomfortably not knowing how to react; Luna serenely went and sat down.

Ron who had followed Harry into the Quidditch pitch was so angry that he stood as far as possible from Harry glowering at one and all. Harry simply ignored him and as they took to the skies that went progressively darker, Harry shivered. Malfoy was there right up with him and both of them looked a long moment at each other and then Harry softly told him not to fly very high.

He nodded once and then both of them were in the skies searching already for the snitch and trying to end the game so that they could rush to safety.

For the first time since he had started playing Quidditch, Harry did not get a single bludger to him. He frowned at that and looked down at where the bludgers were and he saw that every time a bludger went

to the Slytherin beaters, they hit it towards Ron, who was so busy dodging them that he let the goals in pretty regularly.

The Gryffindor chasers were pretty good and they had scored a few goals as well and the score was 130 to 70 in favor of Slytherin and Harry and Draco slowly circled the skies high above, searching for the snitch. They were not as high as they would have flown usually when an hour into the game Harry caught sight of the snitch floating a few feet above the ground by the Gryffindor goal posts.

Wasting no time Harry went into a deep dive just as the deep chills came on. He and Draco felt it first and Harry yelled into his earring that he had not deactivated and to the others, "Dementors!"

Harry pulled his broom sharply coming to a halt the pursuit of the snitch all forgotten, even as Hermione and the others went into action. So did Nott, Bulstrode, Pansy and Blaise in the Slytherin stands.

Draco followed him as Harry turned to the skies and saw dark hooded figures that already started his father's shouts in his brain. He struggled for a second and remembered Hermione and Snape and Sirius and pointing his wand shouted, "*Expecto Patronum.*"

A brilliant white stag erupted from his wand and held a few dementors at bay when there was a stunning spell, which came rushing towards him. Harry swerved to the left and let it pass, but it broke the Patronus spell. He turned again and saw about six death eaters, so Voldemort had sent three more along with the three death eaters he had mentioned to Snape, he thought as he sent another patronus charm.

Meanwhile as Harry and Draco whose patronus was a big albino snake and not a ferret, were sending his patronus after the dementors, there were four more Patronuses that came from Harry's left. As he sent a stunner towards a death eater who was sending stunner after stunner him self, Harry turned his face slightly and saw that one was Hermione, the other Luna and seeing the other two Harry almost fell off his broom with a shock, it was Nott and Bulstrode.

Soon McGonagall joined them after five minutes and Harry using his wand arm for casting the patronus, used his left arm and silently and

wandlessly said, '*diffindo*' in his mind, flicking his left arm a little. It caught one death eater on his chest and he spiraled down to his death.

Half the dementors were here and the other half had gone to suck the souls of the others down.

Harry desperately wanted to look down at how the other students were faring but he did not dare to take his eyes away from the battle here. There were about a hundred dementors and five death eaters who were now fighting furiously chasing each other and flashes of red, blue, orange and purple erupted from them.

McGonagall, Hermione and Luna along with Draco were battling the dementors while Nott and Bulstrode were fighting the death eaters along with Harry who was casting both the patronus and fighting with the death eaters. It was McGonagall who killed the next death eater by casting a return shield that simply rebound the bright orange color curse back to the death eater who did not serve fast enough to avoid it. The spell hit him on his leg and he lost balance and fell down.

Harry was now flying fast turning and twisting in the air as were the others, the dementors chasing them as well as the death eaters. There were about fifty dementors and four death eaters now and McGonagall were dueling with two of them Harry, Hermione, Luna, and the Slytherins were fighting the other two who were left and the dementors.

They were fighting and flying fast and furious darting this way and that with the dementors coming close behind them, giving the chase.

Harry once again cast a Patronus with his wand and cast an '*inflamare*' on the death eater's broom with a flick of his hand, who was sending yet another reddish blue light at him. Expecting the curse to hit him, the death eater was surprised to see that his broom was burning and at that time Nott got in the seeping curse that he seemed to be an expert at and that was the end of that death eater.

It was Hermione who finished off the last death eater. She simply accioed his broom and his wand to her and surprised he fell down from a height of a hundred feet yelling and Bulstrode helped him to

meet the ground on his head by casting the *levicorpus* at him at the same time. He fell with a crash meeting the ground head on that those high up in the air could not hear and Harry was worried to realize that slowly the power in their Patronuses were diminishing as the cold and the chill seemed coming on more strongly and raising his wand Harry cast the patronus spell at them yet again.

Suddenly Hermione looked down by chance to see if the others were safe and squeaked when she saw they were flying over the Forbidden forest and suddenly scared, she shouted a warning to everyone to slowly turn back casting the patronus all the while.

The dementors had now surrounded them and Harry and the others were slowly feeling the chill and their nightmares as they struggled to drive away the dementors. Harry and Draco, Hermione and Bulstrode stood on opposite sides forming a square with Nott and Luna in the center. Six patronus getting weaker and weaker kept coming at the dementors as they tried to get back into the grounds that looked very far from where they were flying.

Ten minutes later Nott stopped his patronus as did Hermione and Harry and the others placed Hermione at the center with Nott and Draco shouted to Harry to keep casting the charm as he tied all of them to their brooms and all their brooms to each other. Hermione was silently screaming by then as was Nott and Harry suddenly angry to see her in such sadness and distress cast some more Patronuses more strongly and was rewarded by seeing both hers and Nott's faces a little less blue.

They really did not know how long they would have been able to withstand as around eighteen dementors who had not been chased away successfully surrounded them, but suddenly there was another blazing patronus of a Phoenix and following it there were more than ten Patronuses that attacked the dementors and drove them away.

The Order had come and along with McGonagall and Flitwick had cast the Patronuses that had saved all of them.

Totally fatigued, Harry and the others turned towards the castle, Hermione and Nott had fainted and Luna who was looking extremely pale herself and Bulstrode were holding them. Harry flew to Luna to

take over Hermione's broom from her hands, but found it was not necessary as McGonagall flew in looking very concerned as did Flitwick who took care of the unconscious two and Harry and the other flew back to the School along with Dumbledore and the other members of the Order who had come to assist the School.

As they touched down Harry simply sank down on the ground and lost consciousness. Dumbledore levitated him and Moody conjured stretchers for the rest and ordering them to lie down the others who were only too glad to lie down were taken to the infirmary, where Pomfrey took charge.

Harry and the rest remained in the infirmary for the rest of the day and Hermione and Nott were there for two days before they were released by Madam Pomfrey. Harry, Draco, Bulstrode and Luna who were released in time for dinner, walked amidst an awkward silence to the Great Hall.

More than fifty students had fainted Harry and the others learnt due to the extreme chill, and almost half of Ravenclaw was injured in one way or other in a panicked stampede that happened as the dementors came and all of them had tried to run away.

As they were nearing the massive doors of the Great Hall, "Bulstrode, Malfoy," Harry called softly to both of them who stood straight but did not turn around to face Harry and Luna walked up to them and faced them with a smile.

"Thank you. Thank you more than I can say, for if you two and Nott had not been there Hermione, myself and Luna would have surely died." He said softly looking at Bulstrode more than Malfoy.

It was Malfoy who answered, though. "We are even Potter. If you had not warned us against a dementor attack and had left us like the Weasel told you to, most of us would have had our souls sucked out. My own father did not see it fit to," he stopped there abruptly and walked away with a silent Bulstrode.

Harry and Luna went behind them and once inside Harry dragged Luna to the Gryffindor table glaring at the Ravenclaws who were looking very guilty, about half the table empty. Harry glanced up at

the staff table but Snape was not there and as Snape had deactivated the earring Harry did not know what was happening at Voldemort's hideout.

Harry and Luna sat at the Gryffindor table with Luna sitting in Hermione's place by Harry's side. There was an unusual silence in the Great Hall as most of the students simply whispered to each other or remained silent and Harry looked around and seeing Dumbledore watching him seriously, started arranging his memories the way Snape had taught him in the holidays.

Ron was there and so was Ginny both of them looking at Harry anxiously. Harry though did not spare them a glance and sat down very hungry and eating as if he had not eaten in a month.

Harry had sat away from Ron and his year mates and near him no one was speaking. He finished dinner in record time planning to visit Hermione before going back to bed as he was very sore still and extremely worried about Snape as well, when there was a tinkle from the Staff table and he looked up to see McGonagall tap her goblet with her wand.

The next minute Dumbledore stood up looking unusually serious and severe. He looked around at everyone, "Today we were attacked by more than a hundred dementors and six death eaters. It was the quick thinking of some of our students and teachers that ensured the dementors sucked no one's soul."

There was a collective shudder as he continued, "Tomorrow there will be no classes to allow everyone to recover from today and I thank all the students especially of the sixth year whom I understand took efficient charge."

He sat down and all the students got up to leave; Harry with Luna following him left swiftly before Ron whom he had seen getting up with a most determined look on his face could come up to him.

Harry had almost reached the doors when a hand came down on his shoulder. He turned to see McGonagall standing there, "Potter the Headmaster wishes to see you, Miss Lovegood, Mr. Malfoy and Miss. Bulstrode at once in his office."

Harry looked around to see Draco and Millicent Bulstrode standing there with a group of Slytherins and McGonagall went to them and spoke a few words to them as well.

Harry sighed and he along with the other three led the way to meet Dumbledore. The four of them walked silently and reached the gargoyle and waited as Harry did not know the password and neither did the others. They need not have bothered though as McGonagall walked swiftly up to them and said, 'Dollops' and the gargoyle opened and all of them went up the stairs to the Headmaster's office.

McGonagall knocked sharply and no sooner did she hear Dumbledore's voice asking all of them to come in than she opened the doors and all of them trooped inside.

Dumbledore was there along with Moody and he was looking very serious and no hint on the twinkle that would be present in his eyes. Moody was glaring at all of them his magical eye revolving round and round in a crazy manner.

Harry, Luna, Draco and Bulstrode were standing very stiffly with Luna standing slightly behind Harry.

"Harry, Mr. Weasley tells me that you knew about the dementors beforehand. Is it true?" Dumbledore asked him not asking any of the students to sit down, a fact that Harry noted before he concentrated on the Headmaster's question.

"Yes Sir." he nodded his head as he looked straight at Dumbledore. "I woke up in the morning and found it very cloudy as was that day in Privet Drive. I felt something was off about it and when I went to the Great Hall I started feeling chill. Then I knew that it was the dementors. It was just the same as on that day. I warned Hermione and told her to place the younger students in the lower stands so that they could be taken to safety.

"I also told Luna, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot and as I was leaving the Hall bumped into the Slytherins and so told them as well. When Luna went to warn the Ravenclaws, they laughed at her and I think that's why so many of them were injured as there was a panic attack, I believe."

"There was no other indication Harry?" asked Dumbledore looking significantly at his scar.

Harry frowned for a second before his face cleared and he gave a small smile. "No Sir."

Dumbledore's eyes lightened at that what he thought was an honest reply and he turned his gaze at all of them. "All of you and I include Miss. Granger and Mr. Nott as well were truly magnificent today. I called all of you to congratulate you on your bravery and all of your willing to work together."

There was no reply from any of them; all of them just scowled except Luna and she was humming softly to herself and Dumbledore's eyes twinkled once more as he dismissed all of them. The Slytherins turned and walked away swiftly as if they could not bear to be the Gryffindors more time than it was necessary. Harry and Luna went to the infirmary and spent some time before they went their ways to their respective dormitories.

Harry went inside only to have a sudden hush fall over the common room and he looked around as all of them stared at him and he smiled uncertainly before walking away to his dorm. He was very tired and wanted some more rest.

Ron and Ginny followed him but Harry turned and looked at both of them and spoke before they did. "I am very tired Ron and not in a mood for another fight. We will speak tomorrow." And Harry went inside and pulling his curtains settled down to wait for news from Snape. But within ten minutes he was fast asleep.

At Voldemort's Hideout

Voldemort had held the cards very close to his chest and he had not allowed anyone to go away since he had outlined the plan to his Inner Circle. He had asked all of them to stay until the dementors and the death eaters he sent to Hogwarts had returned.

So the Inner Circle stayed with him and Lucius Malfoy was hoping his son would not have his soul sucked out. The others in the Outer Circle did not know about the attack except those Voldemort called personally ten minutes before and gave them strict instructions.

“Make sure that those in Slytherin are not harmed and if they do fight you remember they do not know of this attack and they may think this to be a test. If any of them fall because of their foolhardiness you are not to worry. Attack and you have permission to kill any other than Potter. *Do not cast any killing curse on Potter. He is mine understand?* Bring him back as quickly as possible and do not use any hex other than the stunner.” the last words came very sharply and the death eaters shivered before they nodded as one.

Then he called the dementors and gave them specific instructions as well. “Kiss as many as possible. Now go.”

Voldemort waited and waited. A few dementors came first saying they were driven away and Voldemort shook with rage when they said they were driven off by Harry Potter. He lifted his wand and chanted loudly and a white blazing light erupted from his wand and that was the end of the six dementors who had arrived first.

Snape who was sitting there stored that spell in his memory so that he could view it with a pensieve and then the dementors would not pose a problem as all the six had been burnt to a crisp with that spell. It seemed a collective spell.

He was also relieved to know Harry was fine from these creatures. He had heard everything until the time Harry had shouted ‘dementors’ and then with a slight cough had deactivated the earring so that he would not voluntarily exclaim as he heard Harry and the others and give away his place, position and life in the circle.

An hour late the rest of the dementors came in together and informed Voldemort that four of the six death eaters were dead and two of them along with eighteen dementors had surrounded Potter and a few others who were fighting near the Forbidden Forest.

Voldemort was stunned at the fact that four of his men were dead but took heart in the fact that two of them were fighting Potter and eighteen strong dementors were there surrounding them.

Then eighteen dementors came in after twenty minutes, looking more ragged than ever. There was no sign of the two death eaters or Potter. His red eyes started glowing, a bad sign and he glared at the dementors forcing them to speak.

The dementors did not speak for almost five minutes and the longer they stayed silent the more Voldemort became angry and the air started crackling around them angrily and Voldemort's magic started showing up.

"Master, the two death eaters are dead and we were driven away by the Order who came there and fought with us just as we were going to render Potter unconscious and drag him here." Snape said a silent prayer to the Gods and looked attentive.

Voldemort was frothing at the mouth. "How did that happen? Six death eaters killed. The Order uses killing curses?"

"No Master. We attacked in the air when the Quidditch game was being played. When they were stunned or hurt they fell down from a very great height. They would not have survived the fall."

Voldemort was enraged and he made a slashing movement with his hand and all of them were blasted away. The death eaters of the Inner Circle looked at him fearfully as he stomped away inside and slowly they picked themselves up groaning softly lest he would hear them. As they were not dismissed they stayed there as did the dementors.

Voldemort was enraged as he went inside feeling helpless. How did the blasted boy escape time and again? He felt a shudder pass through him as he wondered if the Prophecy would be fulfilled and Potter would finally defeat him. He sat down on the cold floor in his room not aware of where he was, the terrifying thoughts going round and round him.

When he did finally get his bearings it was late at night and he had been there a whole day wallowing in his fear. He got up from the stone floor and went to sleep taking a very strong dose of the Dreamless Draught, forgetting about his death eaters who were still there, not quite daring to leave.

He woke up the next day and remembered his death eaters and went down and found all of them still sitting and sleeping, looking very uncomfortable. "GET UP." He shouted at all of them and watched as all the death eaters woke up hastily and straightened up. "GET OUT." He yelled and all of them went out as fast as they could, leaving a very frustrated Dark Lord.

End of Chapter – 22

Chapter – 23

The next morning Harry woke up very early and after washing and pulling on fresh and clean robes, went to the infirmary where Hermione was still sleeping, though her cheeks seemed less pale than yesterday. Harry sat with her for a few minutes and walked down to the Great Hall for breakfast and found only the Herbology professor there and hardly any student.

All of them were in their beds sleeping late because there would be no class today Harry realized. He could not sleep because of his worry over Hermione and Snape had not returned and nor had he activated his earring. Harry was loath to do so because he was scared he would distract Snape. Harry had a leisurely breakfast and he got up and walked outside.

Contrast to the weather yesterday, today was a beautiful cloudless day. The air was sharp and rather chill but the sun was already creeping out and was valiantly trying to shine brightly. Harry walked around aimlessly before sitting down by the lake under a huge oak tree, the same tree he had sat down for hours as he came to terms with the death of Sirius.

He was there for almost an hour peacefully contemplating on his various themes as he had dubbed them and in between worrying about Snape and thinking about Hermione and the Weasleys.

Arthur had proved to be very tough and showed enormous tenacity when it came to helping them. He brought all kinds of information from the Ministry where he started snooping a lot more. He gave the information to Snape first and allowed Snape to advise him on how much he could tell Dumbledore.

He was also trying to chat up Amelia Bones, on whom he had seen a very distasteful expression when she had seen Dumbledore walking away at the ministry. He saw her and her deputy, Brian Wheeler make faces that clearly showed they did not like Dumbledore. From then on, Arthur Weasley was going out of his way to get them to Harry's side.

Harry smiled to himself as Snape told him that during their nightly chats. He felt sad and great all at the same time as he knew Arthur Weasley had not and most likely would never get over what his three children had done, but at the same time he was fiercely fighting against the evil that was not only Voldemort but also Dumbledore.

Arthur Weasley and because of him everyone was now referring to their team as Harry's side. Harry had felt very angry at first and had protested to Snape, Arran and the others who had teased him by calling him their own Lord and Master but Snape had calmed him down and later speaking to Harry he had told him not to panic just because all of them cared and would help Harry fulfill the prophecy and also improve the world they were living in.

Snape had not given earrings to Arthur initially because he was scared Molly would find out. After strict instructions about never speaking in the home unless it was an emergency Snape had given him and the others earrings and all of them were now connected.

But in spite of all this Arthur Weasley was very cold inside as he suffered everyday about the treachery of his three children. The fact Molly would come to know of this gave him nightmares and he knew Molly was worried and he was forever thankful he had made the vow not to reveal anything to anyone, to Harry. It would take him the rest of his life to overcome that and now he and the other Weasleys were doing their utmost to reduce the betrayal the three had caused.

Harry sat there still watching the lake when he heard steps coming down. Looking up he saw Ron and Ginny coming to him. He looked up at Ron, ignoring Ginny and after a moment he turned to gaze at the lake again.

Ron went red with anger at the intended insult and Ginny nudged him again to calm him down and then Ron and Ginny sat down on either side of Harry.

"Mate I am sorry for yesterday." Ron told him in a low voice.

"Why?" Harry asked him, his eyes still on the lake in front of him.

Ginny placed her hand on Harry and looked at him smiling sweetly. She was alone with Harry at last and wanted to do something to kick start her campaign with him. "Harry Ron never meant all those words he spoke yesterday. Please forgive him."

"Ginny there is nothing to forgive. Ron spoke what he felt. What is wrong there?" Harry asked her smoothly.

Ron and Ginny gaped at him. "Harry you were so angry yesterday." Ginny told him uncertainly as she tried to understand him.

"Yesterday I was already feeling the chill of the dementors and their effects and with the tension of the game I really was not in a position to act very calm I'm afraid."

Harry got up and brushing off his robes, smiled at the other two, "I am going inside. Coming?"

'Harry?' Ginny called out very softly to him even as Ron smiled uncertainly at Harry, feeling very relieved when Harry smiled back at him, "Harry?" Ginny called him again and he looked at her even as he began to walk away with Ron. "Yes Ginny? What is it?"

"Let Ron go. We can stay here some more time and enjoy the beautiful atmosphere around here." She said softly trying to look alluring and fluttering her lashes at Harry.

"Yes mate. Stay here with Ginny." Harry turned and looked at him enquiringly, he blushed, and "I need to use the bathroom. I will come back soon. You stay here with her. She, kind of likes you mate." He mumbled looking down his face all red.

Ginny spoke as well, she would never get a chance like this. "Yes Harry. You are my hero. I have loved you for as long as I like and," she sighed as he gazed up with a look of adoration at her hero.

Harry felt nauseated inside but looking very calm on the outside, he misunderstood deliberately, "Ginny that is very kind of you. But I am no one's hero Ginny. I am an ordinary boy. Come on."

He almost turned to walk away but on a whim decided to peep into her mind as she protested. "No Harry I really love you." What she was thinking was, "The fool is so thick headed. A love potion would be the best. Yes. Mixed in his butter beer, that would be for the best. Or better still would be a spell; yes that is the answer. I must discuss this with Ron and get going and finish it before Hermione wakes up and suspects something."

Seeing Harry look intently at her, she fluttered her eyes at him and watched with satisfaction as Harry flushed. Harry was flushing with anger and not with happiness as he walked away but both Ron and Ginny who to Ron's surprise allowed him to walk away from her, thought he was flushing with pleasure and embarrassment.

Harry went straight to his dorm on the pretext of taking out some books and closed his curtains, which had a privacy charm and a silencing spell on them and activated his earring when he realized Snape had not come yet. He decided to try anyway as he was so angry, he was shaking.

"Severus?" he almost hissed in his anger.

Snape who had just entered Hogwarts did not answer and a few minutes later Harry heard the password to the Headmaster's office.

He calmed down unintentionally as he listened.

Snape in the meanwhile was going to Dumbledore's office to report to him before going to his rooms and speak to Harry, when he actually felt Harry's anger through the link as Harry activated the link. Worried he rushed to the Headmaster's office and went inside.

"Ah! Severus, come in. Tea?"

"Yes Albus, most definitely. The Dark Lord is getting more and more paranoid as the days goes by."

Dumbledore poured out the tea and there was silence for some time.

"Go on Severus." Dumbledore's voice was unusually serious as he looked at his spy who looked very tired and ragged.

Snape sighed, "What am I to say Albus? The Dark Lord did not say a word to anyone about these attacks. He suddenly orders more than a hundred of them to kiss and kill as they like except the blasted boy, whom he hissed was his to kill. They, the dementors I mean were to bring back Potter unharmed.

"He refused to let me go saying that no one in the Inner Circle would leave with the information until the dementors and along with them Potter came back. I was at my wit's end and after some time I hesitantly told him that while it was a good thing that Gryffindors would be kissed the Slytherins along with them would have their souls sucked as well.

"And among the Slytherins were the children of the death eaters who would help the Dark Lord when they left School. So I volunteered as Head of Slytherin House to go along with the dementors and guide them."

Dumbledore made a sound of appreciation at that. "But he wouldn't let me go Albus. He said he could not let anyone with the information of the attack be let out of his sight. Five minutes later, just as the dementors were about to leave he called Mulciber and five others and told them to make sure the Slytherins would not be harmed and if they would fight as most of the brave ones would because they would consider it a test as their fathers would not have told them about the attacks, they were not to be harmed. Did they fight?"

Dumbledore nodded at that his eyes beginning to twinkle. He had been worried about the Slytherins fighting with Harry and this must be the reason why. "Draco, Bulstrode and Nott fought alongside with Harry, Miss Granger and Miss Lovegood."

Snape started at that. He had included that statement only to excuse Draco, Pansy and Blaise's helping the others. But Nott and Bulstrode? That was alarming and astounding.

Dumbledore smiled. "I too was very worried Severus. But this must be the reason why they fought alongside Harry. Please go on."

Snape told him briefly about how the dementors had come back and how Voldemort had blasted all of them and then stormed away inside.

“Even Bellatrix was scared Albus. None of us went inside and we stayed there the whole day not even daring to talk. He came today morning and shouted at all of us to get out and we simply ran for the door.”

Dumbledore smiled at him and told him what had happened here and then sent Snape to sleep his tiredness away. Snape billowed out of the room and almost ran to his quarters and went into his bedroom and called for Harry.

“Harry? What happened? I could feel your anger but could not respond.” He asked Harry very worried.

Harry who had been listening to Snape’s safe return with relief now felt his anger boiling again. “Sev today for the first time I could peep into someone’s mind without their knowledge.” Harry told him tightly.

“Well that is good news isn’t it?” Snape asked Harry bewildered.

Harry’s “NO!” almost made Snape deaf and he winced. Something was very wrong here. “Harry,” he said softly pushing his tiredness down. Harry had not even asked him how he was. He was that bothered and upset.

“Oh! Sev!” Harry’s agitated voice came shakily as he told Snape all that had happened since yesterday when Snape had given him the news.

Snape was stunned at Ron’s callousness and amazed at the fighting and the reaction of Bulstrode yesterday night and became almost as angry as Harry when he heard about Ginny’s thoughts.

“What if she manages to dose me or spell me Sev? I would lose all purpose after that and become their lapdog.”

“You certainly won’t. I will be checking you everyday as will McGonagall and remember I have a monitoring spell on you. Now allow me to talk with Minerva and plan to do something about this; you go out and act normal. Go on Harry. You can do this. Don’t allow them to disturb you like this child.”

Harry slowly calmed down and then he realized he hadn't asked Snape anything about what happened and he apologized, "Sorry Sev, here you are so tired and I was being so selfish and could not even ask you how you were before I started off," Snape cut him off there, "If someone would call you selfish Harry that would be the day I treat Albus and Moody as my best friends. Stupid child. You were terrified and rightly so. Now move on and let me handle this."

Feeling very relieved Harry relaxed and instead of going out, settled down to sleep. An hour later Ginny and Ron came up stealthily and walked up to Harry's bed. All the beds were empty as was the room. Harry was sleeping very soundly. In the discussion they had by the lake Ron had been against Ginny using the love potion as Harry swooning all over her would be very obvious and sudden.

Ginny had been thinking the same thing and they had put their heads together and come up with a spell. Not any spell but the *imperious*. They had decided to cast it together as Harry would not be able to fight a double spell and then inform Dumbledore to ensure that if they were found out they had him on their side and if he was against it they could always remove the spell and then try something else.

What Ron and Ginny did not know was Snape had cast a monitoring charm on Harry to tell him at any point if a spell would be cast at him. Any spell that would hit him, Snape would know. He had cast it after Harry had been hit with the seeping curse. That day they had been fortunate because Snape had kept his earring activated as had McGonagall.

But they would not be so fortunate always and so Snape had taken precautions. He had monitoring charms of Draco, Harry and Blaise and McGonagall had those of Hermione and Pansy.

Snape after listening to Harry had now spoken to McGonagall and both of them had decided to do the same with potions as well. Snape would give Harry and the others a potion he had developed that would act as the monitoring charm in the body. It would alert Snape and McGonagall if any potion was given to these five students, even potions like the pepper up.

So Snape had gone to rest. He would have hardly slept for about ten minutes when the monitoring charm went off in his head. It was Harry's.

Ginny had done the unthinkable. In her anxiety that she had not even got to first base with Harry, in fact Harry was not even aware there was a person by name Ginny, she and Ron had decide to make Harry fall for Ginny. "*Imperio!*" both Ron and Ginny cast it together so that Harry would not be able to repel it.

Had Harry been awake he would have repelled it but he was asleep and the spell hit him square on his back.

Those words woke up Snape in a hurry. He cursed as he was very tired but in a second went to alert as an unforgivable was being cast at his Harry. He had the ring activated and called Minerva and told her to activate her earring to Harry. He could hear the clear voice of Ginny Weasley as could one Albus Dumbledore who was startled and was about to floo to the Gryffindor common room when he heard Ginny's voice and stopped.

"Harry wake up." Harry woke up and she cast the imperious once again along with Ron on him, "*Imperio!* You will fall in love with me and you will be best friends with Ron. You will listen to both of us and professor Dumbledore who has your best interests at heart. You will date me and go out with me and fall wholly and completely in love with me. You will forget this conversation now and go back to sleep." And hit him with a sleeping charm.

Harry smiled a confused smile and with an 'okay Ginny I really love you' flopped back on his bed and went to sleep.

"That was a bit over the top Gin." Ron grinned.

"Of course. The git wasn't even looking at me Ron and today you saw how cold he was towards you. What else can we do? You tell me if you have a better plan. We are almost into February and in a few months we would have finished this year and Harry had yet to speak a whole sentence to me. Professor Dumbledore told me I had to win Harry's affections by this year."

“Well don’t say git and the like to the boy who is about to become your boyfriend and drop Dean else it could get messy.” Ron warned her as she smiled and both of them walked out of the room not noticing a horrified boy who had been about to enter the room to take his bag and hearing the words ‘*imperio*’ had stopped with his wand at the ready. When he realized who it was he had backed into a corner and cast a quick disillusion charm and a notice me not charm on him.

As soon as they went out Neville went in and got his bag and still with the disillusion charm looked at Harry. Harry was sleeping peacefully and Neville bit his lips in worry and then slowly went down. He need not have worried as both Ron and Ginny had gone to the Headmaster to get official sanction for their unforgivable.

The moment he saw they were not there he ran like he had never run in his life and reached the office of McGonagall who was still talking very angrily to a furious Snape. Hearing the knock on her door that looked more like someone was breaking it, she called an irritated ‘come in’.

“Professor,” Neville gasped for breath as he held his side and weakly sat down without invitation in the chair in front of her desk. She looked at him with unconcealed irritation.

“What is it Longbottom?” Neville gasped for breath and after a minute McGonagall conjured a glass of water that he gulped his water gratefully and he looked at her with terror.

“Professor please don’t take my name in this.” He asked her and shook just a little with fear as she literally scowled at him.

“Longbottom,” she barked sharply making the already frightened boy cower in his chair, “I am very busy here.” And scowled as she took in her clean and paperless desk, but fortunately for her Neville was looking at her and so did not notice the small charm that made a few papers appear on her desk. “Tell me what the matter is and I will look into it and I will decide whether I should take your name in anything or not.”

“Professor, I was on my way to my dorm to get my bag to go to the library for studying when I heard someone cast the *imperious* curse.”

Here Neville trembled as he worried about whether McGonagall would chew his head for even thinking about the fact that it had been Ron and Ginny who had done so.

McGonagall stopped breathing as did Snape as they heard Neville's words. "What are you saying Longbottom? In your dorm? By whom and on whom?"

Neville started shaking, "On Harry professor and by Ginny Weasley and Ron was also there. They said professor Dumbledore had ordered Ginny to win Harry's affections by this year and as he did not care for Ginny in that way, they really had no choice. Ginny also ordered Harry to be very loyal to Ron. I swear professor, I heard them. I swear, I swear, I swear." Neville repeated those words again and again thinking no one would believe him over Ginny Weasley and Ron Weasley.

Suddenly the door opened as McGonagall kept staring at the trembling boy who was so scared but was willing to be disbelieved and ridiculed and shouted at about his findings but still had the nerve to report it. This was why he was in Gryffindor she realized. He was the truly brave, fighting even in the face of fear, terror and ridicule.

Neville squeaked as the door opened and his eyes almost popped out in horror as he saw Snape come inside and ward the door. He turned back to the Head of his House and with his eyes pleaded with her not to tell Snape.

"Longbottom," Snape called out to him softly. Neville looked at him his mouth agape and his whole frame trembling.

"I want to thank you first Longbottom for coming to McGonagall with this. Yes I heard the whole thing and no; no one else heard it. And yes I believe you, and so does professor McGonagall."

Neville did the only thing he could do under the circumstances where McGonagall was barking at him and after he told her why he had hurried to her had stared at him totally unnerving him and then Snape of all people being so civil to him and thanking him. Neville's brains did not move beyond that point and he fainted.

Now Snape stared at him and then he looked at McGonagall tiredly and smiled when she told him, "Severus you just thanked him and spoke to him politely. See the reaction you have on my poor Gryffindors." She smiled back at him as he smirked at her and enervated Neville.

He woke up and promptly squeaked as he saw Snape looming over him and looked to McGonagall who was smiling at him, her bad mood apparently gone and pleaded with her through his eyes for help.

"Longbottom, look at me." Snape commanded him. Neville stood up and turned to look at Snape. "Sir," he said his voice quivering, "what I said was true Sir." Neville was totally bewildered as his brain processed the fact that Snape in his dungeons could hear what was happening in McGonagall's office, unless he was here when Neville rushed in and but wait! his brain told him, but Snape had come from outside.

Then did he go out when he, Neville had come in? Neville felt his head spinning as he stood there not able to understand.

Snape's face softened as he looked at Neville. "Sit." Neville sat.

"What you said was completely true. Both of us believe you Longbottom." McGonagall told him softly and watched Neville relax. The first step was okay.

"Now I need your help." Snape told him.

"Yes Sir."

"I want you to do two things. First never mention about this to anyone other than Potter and Granger. You may tell them but only when you are alone with them and have taken the precaution of privacy and silencing charms."

"Yes Sir."

"The second thing is never to talk anything in your dorm. That room has spells placed by the Headmaster to monitor conversations. So no discussion there."

Neville stared at Snape and then frowned at him in confusion at that. "But Sir then won't the Headmaster know of this and punish them, Oh no! She said professor Dumbledore wanted them to get friendly." He looked up at Snape in horror and then turned to look at the Head of his House.

She nodded her head in anger. "Yes the Headmaster is involved."

Suddenly Neville lost it. All this was a bit too much for the boy whose life until then was very simple. He drew his wand and faced both his professors. "Just what is happening here? To Harry?" he shouted forgetting this was Snape and the head of his House and they could have killed him right there and used him as potions ingredients.

"Someone comes and places an *Imperio* on him and both of you seem to know it before I came and told you and now you say Dumbledore is involved. Well I am not going to allow anything to happen to Harry. Got that? I am going to take him away to my Gran's and put him straight on everything and take care of you, you, **goons** as well." He finished with a shout his whole body trembling. Snape was going to hit him with a calming spell when Neville acted suddenly.

Without warning Neville cast a stunner at Snape and he was going to do the same at McGonagall, when she removed his wand from him and locked the door as he tried to rush through it. She enervated Snape and Neville stood there like a boxer his fists closed and ready to take one powerful witch and one powerful wizard without a wand.

"Harry is my friend you get that. He is my friend, my friend." His voice almost broke on that word before he carried on, "My only friend. I would die for him. He had lost too much. Now both of you let me go and I will not say a word of what happened here to Harry. Just tell me the counter for the curse. **Please.**" His voice broke on the last word but he stood still his hands fisted and eyes darting between McGonagall and Snape.

Snape stood there his mouth wide open and McGonagall was no better when Neville suddenly leaped on Snape and tried to take away his wand. He and Snape rolled on the floor and Neville tried to hit him with his fists and take away his wand when Snape disarmed him wandlessly and petrified him and very gently placed him on the chair.

There was only silence and the sound of heavy breathing from Snape and Neville. Snape was looking at him with an expression akin to admiration, only Neville was too scared to understand.

“Fifty points to Gryffindor.” He said softly. “I would award more but it would look suspicious. There is no doubt that you are a Gryffindor Longbottom, as only one of you would even try disarming me when Minerva is right here backing me up.”

Neville stared at him quite unable to do anything else.

“Wait here Longbottom. Minerva hide him if Albus would come here.” Snape took out a vial and charmed off a hair of Neville and mixing it in the potion, drank it up. In a moment he became Neville Longbottom and the real Neville was almost choking in an effort to remove the binds.

Snape left the Transfiguration office and went to the Gryffindor dorms and went through it. Ron and Ginny were nowhere to be seen and Snape walked swiftly to the dorms and stopped. Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan were there chatting about something.

“Hey Neville where’s the fire?”

Neville looked around uneasily as he pointed to his throat. “Hurts. Can’t talk properly.”

“Whatever did you do?” Seamus asked him.

Neville shrugged as if he did not know and keeping his wand well inside his robes, he flicked his hands and cast a nifty spell that made Dean want to use the bathrooms right now.

“Hey Seamus, coming I need to use the loo very urgently. Come with me.”

“But you were fine a minute ago.” Seamus was bewildered as he followed his friend to the bathroom.

The moment he left Snape set to work. He cast a repellent at the door so that everyone would want to be away from that door and turned and went to Harry's bed and found him sleeping peacefully.

He removed his wand and cast many spells on Harry's curtains and closed them, making them see through. Then he woke up Harry, petrified him and stared at Harry who looked at Neville in astonishment, suddenly wanting Ginny and Ron with him.

Snape read that in Harry's mind and gritted his teeth. He then started chanting and pointing his wand traced the curse in Harry and slowly removed it. Harry jerked and broke through the petrificus totalis and lunged at Neville as his senses cleared.

"Harry it is I Snape who has come here polyjuiced as Neville. Now come with me to Minerva's office where he is waiting for you. I will explain everything there. Now hurry as I must leave before the polyjuice wears off."

Harry looked at him suspiciously and Snape sighed. He was really very tired. "I destroyed a horcrux with Regulus." He said softly.

Harry fell into his arms hearing those words and felt like crying.

Snape simply put a finger to his lips and dragged him away from the dorm, carefully removing all the charms, except Harry's on the curtains. He cast a notice me not charm on both of them and they swiftly ran to McGonagall's office. She was sitting there with a petrified Neville who was looking pathetic.

Harry looked at Neville and was about to ask Snape when Snape spoke swiftly and told him everything. Harry flushed and then his anger started spiraling out of control all the things started rattling, Snape to the horror of Neville went over and hugged Harry, talking softly to him and calming him down.

It took a good ten minutes and then Harry with a flick of his wand removed Neville's bind and smiled sadly at him.

"Thanks a lot Nev. These two are on the up though and yeah I knew Ron and Ginny were not really my friends. I would like to talk to you so are you free now?"

Neville was now trying to come to terms with these facts. It all seemed a bit too much for the boy. He nodded his head and said hesitantly, "Harry the curse is removed and Snape did not hurt you did he?"

Snape snorted as Harry glared at him. "What? Harry he stunned me and was about to stun Minerva and after I enervated him and took away his wand he jumped on me trying to hurt me and take away my wand."

Harry looked at Neville in astonishment as Neville blushed and dragged him, "You said you will tell me. Come on. May we go?" he asked Snape and McGonagall both of whom grinned at him and almost gave him a heart failure and nodded at him.

"You did not mention the fifty points you gave Neville Severus." McGonagall teased him as Harry's jaw hit the floor and Snape scowled.

"I can still take it away from my Golden Boy you know." Snape told her snidely and sneered as she burst into laughter. Harry shook his head and suddenly grinned at Snape who flushed when McGonagall told him the story about the points. Snape knew Harry would tease him mercilessly from now on.

Harry and Neville left McGonagall's office and walked far away and went behind the trees and casting many spells Harry told him briefly about what had happened. Neville listened without a word and when he heard about the Slytherins and the oaths they gave and the Weasleys and how they had agreed to help him he stared at Harry openmouthed.

There was only silence after Harry told everything to Neville and both the boys sat there for a long time. Harry was planning to ask Neville to promise him before they left so that no one would be able to pry this information out of him when Neville smiled and very shyly looked up at Harry, "I Neville Frank Longbottom swear on my magic and my

life to stand by the side of Harry James Potter in all his endeavors, to keep all his secrets and fight alongside with him to make our world a better place to live. So mote it be.”

A beautiful golden whirl came out of Neville’s wand and went straight to Harry. Harry was very touched as he said, “I accept the oath given by a friend and promise to do as he does. So mote it be.”

“I accept.” Both of them smiled at each other and after sometime Harry and Neville walked away and Neville found his heart bursting with joy. He had made his parents and Gran proud. He knew.

Snape and McGonagall and indeed all the others had heard Harry’s and Neville’s conversation, except the Weasleys. Snape decided to tell them privately. All of them were shocked at Neville’s oath and McGonagall was very proud of her Gryffindor and could not stop smiling. Two of them were very bad but there were students like Harry and Neville and Hermione too.

Snape an hour later called Arthur Weasley and the others and told them what had happened and Neville’s inclusion in Harry’s side. Arthur was unbelievably angry as he sat in his office. He cast a privacy charm and spoke to Snape almost frothing at the mouth.

“I wish to pull them from the School Severus and,”

“Will you shut up.” Snape hissed to the very angry man. It had been a horrible half hour for Snape. First he had told all the Weasleys and all of them had almost bitten his ears off and it had taken the combined efforts of Snape, McGonagall, Arran and Harry to stop them from coming over to Hogwarts and kill Ron and Ginny right then.

After all the hoarse yelling that made him wonder how they were not caught at work and sent home, Arthur had wanted to disinherit them from the family. Then Snape had to very acidly remind him of his beloved wife.

Now it was pulling them from School.

"You wish to inform Albus of our activities, fine then. But for doing so you need not deprive your children of their right to education." Snape had sneered and had bestowed pearls of sarcasm and everyone had snorted unanimously at him.

"Speak the King's English man." Arran had told him and stopped to lighten the thick atmosphere when he heard a sob.

"What are my children doing Severus? What have they become?"

No one could answer that and Arthur deactivated his earring and put his head into his hands wondering what he and Molly did not teach to the three children that made them so different.

"Bill, please take a day off work and see to your father." Snape softly told the eldest child who went at once to request some time off. Harry had written to the goblins that Bill was working with them and the goblins promised to never question his requests for absences until the war was over.

Snape told the others not to call him short of another imperious and crashed for the rest of the day getting up only for dinner.

That night Hermione and Nott were released a day before they should have as they seemed very fine. Harry had avoided everyone like the plague and had holed himself in the Room of Requirement for the rest of the day coming out only for dinner and he was thrilled to see Hermione.

Harry beamed at her and she beamed back at him and after enquiring if all was well with her, Harry sat down to eat and Neville who stuck to Harry like glue also grinned at Hermione and soon all of them were chattering away.

They had almost finished when Ron and Ginny ran into the Great Hall and stopped in amazement as he saw Harry there.

"Harry," Ron said walking on eggshells and looking very warily at him. Harry smiled at him and Ron at once beamed back.

“Hey Ron, where were you? We are all finishing here and going straight to the library to study. Hermione wants to catch up on her studies. Will you finish and come along?”

Ron did not know what to answer to that very normal query and he nodded as a matter of habit. Harry as usual did not look at Ginny and looking casually at the staff table saw the frown on Dumbledore's face as he registered Harry was not even acknowledging Ginny.

Harry looked away and saw Nott sitting at the Slytherin table and looking at him. He nodded once and to his surprise Nott nodded back. Then Harry followed the same routine as 'The Gang' laughed and chatted as they went along.

Ron and Ginny were baffled and Dumbledore was even more perplexed as the three of them wondered how Harry could break four imperious curses. McGonagall and Snape smirked to themselves and kept a straight face.

Hermione came to know what had happened in the two days she had been recovering and she was furious. “No more going to The Burrow Harry. If they can do this here I cannot even imagine what they will do to you in their home. Even with Mr. Weasley and the others around, they could try something. Alright?”

Harry agreed and they said their good byes and five minutes later Harry's earring activated.

“Are you asleep Harry?”

“No Sev what is the matter?” Harry asked him with worry when there was loud laughing and McGonagall's voice saying all of them were stupid over the laughter. Before Harry could ask more a chorus sounded.

“Whipped, Potter. She has you right where she wants you.” And all of them laughed and Harry blushed like an idiot and huffed and snarled at them but there was only more shouting and laughter and Harry left it giving it up as a bad job.

Snape had not called the Weasleys as he knew today they would not be in a mood for jokes. They said their good nights for real this time and went to bed.

Harry had spelled his curtains with many spells this time and he had made sure he would know if one of them were breeched or broken by tying the spells to him.

Then he went to sleep thinking not about Hermione and the others teasing but about Neville and his oath, a warm feeling inside him.

The next day was a very baffling and a very fearful day for Ron and Ginny Weasley. They kept looking at Harry expecting him to react but Harry acted as he usually did. He did not speak a word out of place and the new thing was Neville, Hermione and Luna was always with him. Harry himself was slightly perplexed by Luna's behavior but he had since long stopped trying to figure her out.

Dumbledore was even more puzzled at this new development. Had Harry known he knew about being *Imperiouised* Harry would have made enough fuss to bring the roof down? So he did not know, but the Weasley brother and sister had cast four *imperiouses* on Harry. How did that not affect him? Moody when told of this had no answers except to gruffly tell Dumbledore that Harry must be closely watched.

So the days went by and none of them could find anything suspicious about Harry or his actions. Harry had also cast a repellent charm at his curtains and also on Neville's so Ron never came to him once Harry drew the curtains together.

Harry had kept quiet only for Molly's sake. He would have kicked up a lot of fuss otherwise. He knew how upset the Weasleys had been when they had come to know and Arthur had been reduced to tears once again. If Harry had openly accused them, then Molly Weasley would have known and it would have simply destroyed her.

Another reason Harry kept quiet was that he did not want to tell Dumbledore he had been able to throw off four imperious spells cast at him because that would make Dumbledore check him very thoroughly and Harry had wanted to escape that. So the Weasleys and Dumbledore stayed baffled and watched Harry very closely.

Soon the spring holidays came by and Harry point blank refused to go to the Weasleys and in fact urged Ron also to stay at the castle so that they could study. While Ron was removed from his Runes class Harry was still going to take his OWLS and he had insisted that he stay in the castle, quite loudly.

Ron had agreed to stay at Hogwarts along with Harry but an owl from Arthur came three days before Easter and he asked Ron and Ginny along with Ginny's books to come home as they would be visiting with Charlie. Not able to refuse, Ron and Ginny went home to The Burrow very reluctantly leaving Harry and the rest of 'The Gang' at the School to enjoy a very peaceful holiday.

End of Chapter – 23

Chapter – 24

The Easter holidays were very peaceful inside the School, though it was marred by bad news that came constantly from outside.

The warding of all the muggleborn and half – blood students' homes had been completed and now the Order had been going to as many wizarding homes as they could each day and were warding it against death eaters.

Draco, Arran and the others were constantly away on raids. Snape had been summoned to Voldemort's side the day School ended and was told to stay there. Every day there were attacks where muggles and wizards were killed randomly.

Voldemort had told Snape to send one message only, saying that Snape would return the day before School resumed after the Easter break. Snape had sent a secret message inside of that message by blood magic and when Voldemort had demanded the parchment to check he had not found anything, though he had smelt blood, but had not taken notice as Snape had told him unless he checked the blood and found it to be Snape's, Dumbledore would not believe it was from him.

Dumbledore had been dismayed by Snape's letter that had told him Voldemort was planning to attack almost everyday. Snape had asked him to patrol but this time without the names of the places it was far more difficult for the Order and the aurors to fight back.

Voldemort after the failure with the dementors had become even more paranoid. He refused to let Snape out of his side, making him work hard making potions under his eye. Each death eater was told where to attack and was sent away. No one knew where the other death eaters would attack.

They tried their best though, Dumbledore and the Order and the aurors but most of the times even their best was not enough.

Snape had his earring activated all the time and he listened as Arran and the others told McGonagall everyday what was happening and the places they were ordered to attack for the day which was not much.

McGonagall would then suggest five places including the place Arran was with the other death eaters. Arthur would suggest another five with one that Draco would tell him he was scheduled to attack and Bill would cover yet another area that had a village Pansy, Blaise and a few others were given and so on.

But this time the Order and those on Harry's side were not as successful as the previous time as the time between the time Arran and the Slytherins knew and they spoke to McGonagall and the Weasleys were very little for one. The other thing was if Draco or any of the Slytherins were with a senior death eater as was most often the case then they would not even know where they would be attacking. They would simply take the portkey offered and start the torture. It was during the rare times they knew. Then they told the others.

Even if they knew, McGonagall and the others could also not directly apparate to the village she knew Arran had gone to as it be suspicious and so they sometimes met and fought the other death eaters and sometimes they were too late.

The times they did meet McGonagall, Arthur and the others in Harry's side inflicted great loss to the death eaters. Arthur and indeed all the others had another wand they had procured from Knockturn Alley and they used killing curses or dark curses that would surely kill or at least maim them badly so that they would be out of commission for some time at least.

One of the many death eaters who were injured gravely were Nott who was hit by a dark curse by Bill Weasley and Pansy who was hit when she met Moody in a random attack and many of the seventh year Slytherins were hurt when they came face to face with the Order or the aurors.

But no one was captured, though McGonagall had managed to kill three of the death eaters who were new recruits and Arthur had cast

the cutting curse that severed the head from the body of a boy who was not more than twenty.

In all it was a very frightening Easter for the muggles and a terrifying one for the Wizarding World.

Nott had been very seriously injured and it was more than a month after School started that he was declared fit to come back. He had become very pale and was still very weak.

Pansy would miss the rest of the School year and in fact came only two days before the sixth year exams. It had been a very close thing that she survived, a fact that worried Harry and the others no end until she had pulled through. She would not be taking her exams in all subjects this year but would divide her exams between now and during Yule when she would finally complete her sixth year ahead of the NEWTS.

Though none of the senior death eaters had got hurt or were killed, all the Slytherins in the sixth and the seventh year now had a full grasp of what it was to be a death eater and almost all of them were terrified as they contemplated the job that they would have to do on a continuous basis until they died.

Nott moved like a shadow once he came to School and after that spring break most of the Slytherins and a few Ravenclaws were very quiet. The School as a result was a lot more harmonious and Harry and 'The Gang' were left more or less to their devices as Dumbledore was often called away either by the Ministry or the Order because Voldemort had stepped up the attacks.

Snape was not informed of the attacks and Voldemort had quite bluntly told him he would not be called until the holidays so that Dumbledore would not expect any information from him.

He did rush to tell Dumbledore whenever Arran came with information of places that Bellatrix or his father or any other death eater from whom he had overheard the schedule for attack but they were very few. Snape had already told Dumbledore about a death eater whom he had on the imperious and he, Snape had asked him to tell him

anything the Dark Lord would tell him. Dumbledore was impressed by that; but information was very little and very rare.

He never told Dumbledore where Arran was to go alone because it would put Arran and Ria in danger and anyway Arran would never kill or hurt, only arrange memories of the attacks in his mind and conjure stone and wood and transfigure them into tortured men and women who would last the night in case any death eater would come to check and leave it at that before apparating to another place and try to find out about the other attacks.

The next two months went along like this with the war truly under way and for now the homes of the muggleborns and the half – bloods were safe. That was one thing the Order had done well. They had not only warded the homes of the students but also as many homes as possible by placing them under the Fidelus or blood wards that would keep them safe from the attacks.

Muggles were not so fortunate though and they were the ones who suffered the most in the next two months. Arran when sent alone would apparate ceaselessly until he found the other places of attack and then did his best to kill as many death eaters as possible.

Voldemort lost a few of his death eaters that way at the hands of Arran and Ria. But those times too, were very few and far in between as no one knew who was going to attack where and it was on rare occasions that Arran could overhear something worth the while or stumble in on another attack.

Pansy came back to a big welcome in Slytherin. She had lost half her weight and three of her fingers in her left hand. She had artificial fingers in them that looked pretty real. Nott saw her and shuddered especially when he saw the false fingers that had been seamlessly stitched to her hand.

Nott had returned to the School a very disturbed boy. He was also a Slytherin and a very ambitious boy as well. There was hardly a Slytherin who wasn't. He and all of them had joined the Dark Lord to

ensure their blood would be pure without infiltration and to keep their world completely secret from the muggles.

Dumbledore was against that because he felt that there would be no harm in telling muggles about their world and already the muggle Prime Minister and almost all the immediate family of the muggleborns were having way too much information about their world. That was dangerous and only one muggleborn had to take it into his or her head to bring the muggles in and then there would be only chaos.

But the way of the Dark Lord to tackle the issue was just not on. Mad killing and fighting and uncaring of the people he lost was so stupid and Nott shivered simply to think of the Dark Lord as stupid. But he morbidly thought on as if his thoughts would simply not leave him to himself.

When he had been on the hunts before he had become injured Nott had been shocked by the sheer number of muggles. When he had been injured and out of the madness for a while at least he thought bitterly, when he had been recuperating, he had taken the pains to find out the wizard/muggle ratio and had almost fainted in shock. There were more than fifty million muggles in Britain alone and over six billion muggles all the world over.

There were hardly about a hundred thousand magical folk and the way those who were not in the service of the Dark Lord were being targeted there would hardly be any left. Then where would the pure bloods be wondered Nott, if they did not have enough pureblood witches and wizards to marry. They would have to resort to marrying muggles and then what would happen of the Dark Lord's claim to do away with the muggles he snorted to himself.

With the population that the muggles had, to kill them off one by one would not be feasible and killing off the witches and wizards would only end in reducing the already small population that was there.

Nott had brooded and thought until he felt a mounting resentment for the Dark Lord. His father had been in the Outer Circle of the Dark Lord's ranks and he, Nott had been second only to Malfoy in the political rankings at Slytherin. His father had been killed in what Nott

was now beginning to think a wholly stupid exercise just because the Dark Lord was *angry* of all things.

At that time though Nott had grieved but had proudly taken his father's place as Head of the Nott family of which he was the only son and also the mark to serve his Lord. He had foolishly tried to get into the inner ranks straightaway by killing Potter at The Three Broomsticks.

Nott shuddered; what a fool he had been. Potter had thankfully survived and Snape had told him that Potter was the special kill of the Dark Lord and had he known how close Nott had come to killing the boy his Lord had *failed to time and again*, Nott would have been tortured and then only killed.

Potter! Nott mused, the boy had from fifteen months onwards had taken upon him the task of defeating the Dark Lord time and again. Nott scowled angrily as he thought of his father and now his grieving mother. He unlike so many in Slytherin had a very loving upbringing and his father had taken the mark not to get ahead in the Wizarding World but because he had firmly believed in the theories of the Dark Lord.

The Nott family was almost as rich as the Malfoys though they did not boast of their wealth as the Malfoys did. They also were one of the prominent families who contributed to the finance of the Dark Lord and the death eaters.

The dementors! Nott thought with a scowl. The six death eaters were a joke. They never guided the dementors but tried their best to stun Potter and take him to the Dark Lord so that they would be favored, showed once again the lack of respect for life, even of their own. They had not minded that Slytherin House would be there in full force and had Potter not warned them, Nott knew there would be much causality that day.

The Dark Lord used them, their money, the money of the Notts, Parkinsons, Zabini, Malfoys, Lestranges and Bulstrodes not to mention the Crabbes and Goyle and he did not even acknowledge the loss of life of his father or of Rabastan Lestranger but went on attacking and putting more and more pureblood families into despair

by ordering their deaths because that is what the death eaters were doing every time they went to attack.

They were in turn attacked by the aurors or the Order and apart from the Inner Circle no one really escaped unscathed. Even in the Inner Circle, Rabastan and Amyctus had been killed. And even they were not recognized for their contribution.

Nott had been brooding ever since he had returned to the School, very gladly for the first time because it would save him from the Dark Lord for the next three months. Hogwarts now was his sanctuary. He had looked around his class mates and the others in Slytherin whom he knew to be death eaters. He saw the haunted looks on their faces and Pansy returning with three of her fingers missing was the last straw.

He decided to act and if he were killed for it, well he decided grimly it would be a better death than dying for the bloody maniac.

He carefully went deep into the dungeons and warded a room with many, many spells. Then he chose carefully and sent invitations, formal ones to discuss certain issues to Draco, Pansy, Blaise, Crabbe, Goyle, Bulstrode, Gavin, Thomasin, Bornis the last three of them seventh years who he had known to have been injured badly and had also seen the terror when Nott had been injured (he had been with them that day) and he had noticed they had come back to School as relieved as him, Boot from Ravenclaw who had lost his father the same day he, Nott had lost his and Tracey Davies and Daphne Greengrass.

Draco and the others received the invite in the Great Hall in the morning and were very shocked. Draco looked at the neat note and then looked up at Nott in confusion as Nott looked blankly at him and nodded once. Draco looked at the note and read it once more.

Draco,

I wish to discuss something of great importance with you and a few others. Please assemble in the common room at midnight and I will take you to a room I have specially prepared for this meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Theodore Nott

Draco, Pansy and Blaise looked around to see who else had got the note he found that all of sixth year and a few of seventh year had received it.

Draco let his eyes roam the Hall casually and found Boot with a note that looked like his but no one else. Well Draco thought this was interesting. He would have some information he hoped to give to Snape tonight about Voldemort and if he was very lucky even the next attacks could be known.

Pansy and Blaise were thinking the same thing and all of them did not react at all and went about doing their thing. Exams were over and they had no classes until three days later when they would leave for their home.

All of them were anxious about what Dumbledore would do regards Harry's living arrangements. Dumbledore had not said a word on the subject. Harry could stay until he was seventeen in that house 'safely' but after that even as per Dumbledore's great wisdom he would have to leave.

Harry himself was sure Dumbledore would ask him to go either to The Burrow or to Grimmauld Place and Harry did not want to go to either place. The Burrow was now very uncomfortable for him not only on account of Ron and Ginny but also because he did not want to face the other Weasleys in their home. He still felt guilty whenever he remembered Arthur crying and although he felt strong that the Weasleys were on his side, Harry felt bad for them as well.

Draco with the invite firmly in his hands informed the others about the note he and almost everyone who was a death eater had received. Snape was the first to tell him to be cautious.

"You will not tell them anything Draco, Blaise and Pansy and all of you will have your earrings activated at all times."

Draco and the others who were sitting on his bed in his own room that he had because his father was a death eater in the Inner Circle rolled their eyes, "And don't take me lightly and roll your eyes; even though I am not there I know you are rolling your eyes." Snape told them highly irritated, making them snicker.

Snape's eyes softened. These children had suffered as much as Harry. For their brilliance they deserved so much more. But he would take it if they would just survive the war and got along with their lives.

That night Draco and the others waited in their common room for Nott to arrive and he came at a quarter to twelve and found all of them already there and he silently led the way outside and went to the potions classroom where Boot was standing near the door.

Then Nott turned around and led the others deep into the dungeons and led them to the door of the room he had prepared earlier and opening it he allowed the others to enter. All of them silently entered now feeling slightly scared rather than curious.

Nott flicked his wand at the door turning back on the others and he very quickly flicked his wand on his hand and put a few drops of blood on the door and sealed it.

He turned back and walked to the other corner of the room and went to a small table at knee length and sat on it and looked around at everyone in silence. There were thick carpets and cushions on the floor and soon everyone made themselves comfortable and then looked expectantly at Nott.

Harry, Hermione, Snape and McGonagall not to mention Arran and Ria and all the Weasleys were listening as well. Snape had his wand at the ready and was in fact outside the door of the room where the others had gone in and was listening intently ready to gate crash at the slightest indication of any violence.

"Thank you every one of you who have come here today." Nott began looking very nervous and scared. He was actually terrified about what he was planning to suggest but the alternative of continuing to work for the Dark Lord was even more terrifying.

“What I am going to tell you here is not only very important but very secret as well. I will ask for an oath on your magic if you do agree with me and your permission now to oblivate you if you do not. I would not tell you about obliterating you but I wanted to be very honest and forth coming about everything and I wanted you to know the seriousness of what I will be speaking here.”

He stopped there and looked at all of them who were looking very puzzled and confused. Gavin the seventh year scowled. “This had better be good Nott. If I find you are wasting our time you will pay for it and why did you not call the other death eaters here and also Snape who is in the Inner ranks here?”

“Because I am about to turn traitor and the other death eaters in the seventh year are those who are still mesmerized by the Dark Lord, oh what the hell, **Voldemort**.”

All of them collectively shuddered except Draco, Pansy and Blaise gaped collectively at him wondering if he had gone mad. Draco, Blaise and Pansy were looking very shocked and then were speculatively looking at Nott.

Out side Snape’s jaw hit the floor when he Nott’s voice through the earring, as did the jaws of almost everyone who was listening there. They were listening thinking they were going to hear something else and Nott had totally stunned them.

“What the hell are you saying man?” asked another seventh year Bornis who was looking as if he would wet his pants at the mention of the Dark Lord’s name.

“Do you know how many muggles are there Bornis? Six billion all around the world.” At the gasps that ran around the room Nott continued his eyes flashing angrily, “There are over fifty million in the U.K alone. We are a hundred thousand and twenty five percent of us are muggleborns and fifty percent are half bloods and the rest are pure bloods.

“Among the pure bloods so many families that have joined with the Dark Lord are now died out thanks to him. The Crouches, the Blacks, the Lestranges are surely going to be killed or kissed, the Malfoys,

Notts I am the only one left and I will surely die in the service of Voldemort, Flint is dead and his father died too and that is the end of that pure blood family, the Zabini's, the Parkinsons; Pansy's one brother is dead and if the other will die then that family is also finished, do I have to say more?

"All of us are fighting to keep our blood pure and our world secret. Both are not accomplished because Dumbledore is determined to make our world known to the muggles and the Dark Lord is killing us every day by planning raids on fifty million muggles in the U.K. What if a muggleborn like Granger takes it into her head and brings the muggles at one point to help them against Voldemort?" all of them squeaked in fear at that thought.

"Where will we be on all that? What will happen to us and more importantly the values for which we have taken the mark and have lost so much, family, money, and slowly the pure blood status as well for that is what all this will come to? Voldemort is hell bent on only one thing. Kill Potter and kill muggles, kill muggleborns, kill half bloods, kill, kill, kill. Then what? Well he bloody does not have a clue."

Nott was trembling now, shaking in the enormity of what he was revealing to his fellow death eaters, but having started he could not stop. He just ranted on.

"Mark my words, there will be no one left to rule or impose his decisions upon in a little while from now. And my dear Slytherins Voldemort cannot bloody touch Potter. That much we know. Potter has something behind him that keeps him from falling into the maniac's hands every time.

"The shame of it all is that **Potter** was willing to give us information that actually saved us against the dementors. the bloody Weasel; I want to kill him," Nott scowled angrily, "he and his sister fought with Potter saying that the Slytherins could get their souls sucked and it would be a blessing but Potter gave us the information *we must have got from our people*.

"Our families must have told us to be safe, to be prepared but Voldemort did not allow anyone with the information to leave his side and even Snape was not able to warn us. If it weren't for Potter so

many of us would have had our soul sucked out that day. All of you know that.

“Bloody hell; Voldemort as our Master and our Lord does not recognize our life is worthy, while Potter who is our enemy and the one Draco has taunted so much in the past, the one against whom I cast the seeping curse that would have almost killed him, saved us.

“There is something so very wrong there and I for one think that Potter is a better man than our Lord. *What a shame!* Then take the random attacks against the muggles in the last few months where only Pansy and I survived by the skin of our teeth and all of you are lucky you are living. When we will fall like the others is anybody’s guess.

“To die for a cause is fine but to die trying to kill fifty million muggles is suicide and I *don’t want to kill myself.*”

The silence that was terrifying and understanding and so palpable could have been cut with a knife as all of them sat there and stared at Nott.

In the silence Draco spoke first very hesitantly.

“I think Nott is right. Potter actually thanked me and Bulstrode saying that if we and Theo who was in the infirmary at the time did not help them all of them would have died. My father could have sent a message by simply going to the bathroom; but,” very bitterly, “He did not think his only son to be worthy of saving.”

“Potter actually fought with the Weasel and I agree with Theo that both he and his sister must be killed really. He had the balls to say, ‘Harry they are Slytherins after all. So what if they have their souls sucked? It would be a good thing’.” Bulstrode added viciously.

The other Slytherins started talking about Ron and Ginny and for a while Draco let them be for some time cursing the brother and sister because he knew that to be a cover for the more important things they were thinking inside and then he clapped his hands asking for attention.

“What Theo says is right. I was there the other day and Potter told the Weasel that he wanted to save everyone and he had noticed that most of us had gone to the stands already and warned us and also gave the incantation for the Patronus charm to use them against the dementors.

“But taking into account what Theo says is one thing. What are we going to do about it is another. To even think about going against the Dark Lord is one thing but to whom can we go. The moment they see our marks the Ministry will kill us. Dumbledore will never trust us and will never even look at us as worthy of being saved from the Dark Lord. He hates Slytherin.

“Yes he does and it is because of him that Slytherin House has such a bad name.” Gavin said angrily.

No one had said Nott was mad or that he should be killed for saying he wanted out. Draco took heart from that.

The other Slytherins had been terrified and Nott had chosen well. He had seen all of them in combat with the Order like him, and he had noticed the look of terror on their faces. He had also seen the relief of the Slytherins and the quiet was they conducted themselves after they came back to School. There were a few others as well and Nott had avoided them when he had heard them boast of all the filthy muggles who had been killed so far.

“How can we fight more than fifty million muggles? That is near impossible. What is the Dark Lord thinking?” Boot asked shakily.

“Who knows what he is thinking? *I think* he is totally mad though.” Nott replied bitterly.

“Well talking is all very well. Even if I do agree who will save us?” asked Gavin desperately as the room fell silent at the question.

“Potter!” Pansy said in the silence.

“He will never believe us.” Boot told her.

"He will if you give him an oath on your magic. That cannot be false and if I know anything of Potter he would die rather than betray our trust. And if he can save us he will die to do that. He is made that way and the proof is in the way he fought his best friend to save us and he thanked Nott who almost killed him for fighting along side with him, when he knew it was Voldemort who sent the dementors and the death eaters to Hogwarts." Pansy spoke into the silence.

"Let us meet him. All of us and ask him just where he is and will he be able to help us later if we help him in the war. If not anything that offer will make him think." Draco continued after Pansy spoke and all of them were silent for a long time.

"We will be going against our parents?" Gavin asked a little nervously. The others nodded too. Family obedience was a way of life for most of them in the Wizarding World and to go against it would mean going against all they believed and lived for until now.

"Yes and I am glad Theo brought this up. I will be going against my father who is in the ***Inner Circle***. I too have been thinking about what has been happening since the dementors came and I for one am very glad I am being given an opportunity to fight for the right cause and not for a cause that will not only bring my end but the end of my family, our world and of magic." Draco told everyone firmly and Pansy was the first followed by Blaise to side with Draco and Nott.

It was the comment about his father in the Inner Circle that had swayed most of them Draco knew. If Draco whose father was in the Inner Circle thought it was not worthwhile to be a death eater then what chance did the rest of them have?

Slowly all of them simply raised their hands for a minute before letting it fall and then slightly trembling Tracy Davies asked Draco. "Draco how will we be able to escape the Dark Lord and our families? They will kill us for being traitors."

"Only if they know Tracy." Pansy told her. "What if they do not know?"

"But how can we do that?" Bornis asked.

"I really do not know. Let us call Potter and Granger here tomorrow and speak to them. Call Longbottom as well. Potter will surely come then rather than if we call him alone as he would think that to be a trap. Longbottom has come a long way from where he was before. He cast so many Patronuses when the dementors came that time and was so confident. He is a pure blood and if Potter and Granger do not understand something, he will and he will explain it to them."

"Yeah! No Weasels." Bulstrode said sneering.

"Hear, hear." Everyone said and as it was getting very late, almost dawn, all of them simply raised their wands and said, "I will not betray anyone here to the Dark Lord, his death eaters or Dumbledore and the Ministry." And they waited for Nott to open the door and went out feeling very scared and just a bit relieved that they had a chance now, a very small chance that they would be saved and need not go about endlessly killing and torturing others.

While the power to lord over others was nice, all these Slytherins gathered here preferred to do it in a sly and cunning manner and indulge in political warfare and fight for political power. To go about behaving like executioners brought up the bile and it was terrifying for all of them to be killing helpless people who had no clue why they were being attacked was no fun.

"Hey! Who will call those three here?" Gavin asked.

"I will, if Nott does not mind as this is his show." Draco told everyone.

Nott was very relieved. "This is our show Draco and no I do not mind."

"Okay unless I say otherwise we will meet here at midnight tomorrow. Is that fine?" Draco asked all of them smiling for the first time.

They left and Draco went to his room and secured it tightly and then yelled happily into his activated earring.

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, YES!" he shouted pumping his hand in the air and making everyone shout in joy as well. Harry screamed along with him in sheer joy and it was a good thing there were such things

called silencing charms in the Wizarding World, otherwise they would have surely been found out. Hermione and Pansy along with Arran and Ria and Blaise laughed aloud as the congratulations were passed around from all of them to Draco and the other two.

"You were great guys." Harry told them his happiness bubbling along the link. "But did you have to make me the scapegoat? Potter will die for us. Really Draco."

Draco laughed. "What can I say Golden Boy! That is your trademark it seems. We came to you thinking exactly like they did today and," here Draco turned serious, "you have never let us down have you?"

Harry blushed and he tried to sneer at them and then gave it up as the others simply laughed and all of them toasted him and Draco loudly. Snape and McGonagall and Arthur felt incredibly proud of the boys at that moment.

All of them went to sleep and woke up in time for lunch only. Harry woke up all disoriented and feeling a sense of excitement for which he did not know the reason until he remembered that night.

He got up and rushed to wash and then went down to fill his rumbling stomach that had missed breakfast. They had not planned anything deciding to deal with everything as it came and Harry went to the Great Hall when a hand pulled him aside.

It was Draco, Nott and Gavin the seventh year. Harry struggled and was about to hit them with his hands when Draco spoke in a calm tone. "Potter we are not here to fight. We are here to ask you if you are interested to speak to a few of us."

"Why?" Harry asked angrily glaring at Nott and then at Draco. "So that you can take me to that thing you call Lord and Master?"

"All three of us swear Potter on our life that we will not harm you. We just want to speak something seriously with you. You don't need to come alone. Bring the mud," at Harry's stare Draco coughed, "Granger and Longbottom, but no Weasley."

Harry started at them for a long moment. "Where? When?"

Draco blinked as Harry accepted. So did the other two. "Tonight at a quarter to midnight. Come to the potions room and we will take you from there."

"You will not harm Hermione and Neville and you will not call her a mudblood and him a squib. Alright?"

They nodded looking bemused at Harry's words. He did not ask them anything more and then he slipped away from them and went into the Great Hall and sat down to eat like a pig.

As he was finishing Neville ran into the room and stopped finding Harry there. "Hey! Where were you?" Harry smiled at him and then grinned at Ron and Hermione who had walked in.

"Harry!" Ron exclaimed. "Mate you slept like the world was coming to an end."

Harry grinned at him. "Yeah! After the exams I feel so tired all the time. Really. And this is only out sixth year Ron. Next year is our NEWTS and I shudder to think about them and the work that will be involved."

Ron grinned back at him and sat down to eat along with Hermione, who was already beginning to study for her NEWTS. She had a book on Charms in front of her and was deeply studying.

Ron and Ginny had been very puzzled all these months that their four imperious spells had not worked on Harry. Dumbledore had even asked Harry to come to his office on the pretext of enquiring after him and he had carefully checked his aura and magic. But he could not find anything wrong there and he had no other option except to believe that Harry had thrown it off as he did with the false Moody in his fourth year.

Dumbledore was relieved in a way because if anyone came to know of this Ron and Ginny would be sent to Azkaban. And he was more relieved that Harry had fought the curse and thrown it off without realizing what it was that made him long for Ginny and why he felt it as silly as he had never felt that way about her.

While Ron and Ginny being sent to Azkaban by itself would not affect Dumbledore deeply, he would have no one near Harry who would report to him so faithfully for money.

So Dumbledore had let it be and had warned Ron and Ginny not to cast any more imperious or give any potion that could be traced to them and try and win his affections in the normal way.

That was proving to be impossible though Dumbledore's plans for the holidays could change all that. Well he would hope anyway.

Now Harry and 'The Gang' finished their lunch and walked out to the lake and were there the whole day laughing and playing. As they were going to dinner Harry had flicked his hand at Ron and Ginny making them feel extra tired.

They had a sumptuous dinner and then went up to their common room and Ron and Ginny could barely keep their eyes open. Ginny got up yawning. "It is all that fresh air and exercise I think. I am so tired. Good night Harry. Goodnight guys." And she went with Hermione who also told everyone she was tired too and she would join Ginny and go to sleep.

Ron was yawning and Harry laughed as he dragged him upstairs and pushed him on his bed and flicked his hand once more. Ron was dead to the world. Harry flicked his hand once more for good measure and loudly told Ron and Neville he too was crashing and signaling Neville to come close Harry drew the curtains around his bed.

Checking his curtains for the spells he had placed on them he smiled at Neville and told him all that had happened the night before. Neville listened with his eyes almost popping out of his head and when Harry finished, he grinned and agreed to come at once.

They went to their beds and waited for a quarter to midnight. Dean and Seamus came at about eleven and ten minutes later there was only silence. Harry got up at a half past eleven and went to Neville's bed and found him reading a book on Herbology. He put a finger on his lips and dragged him out and went to Dean's and Seamus's beds and flicked his hand at them.

Another flick at Ron and Harry was ready. He cast the invisible charm as well as a repellent charm and a notice me not charm on Neville and him and went down. He cast a privacy spell and spoke to Hermione who was using her wand to place sleeping spells on her dorm mates and her third sleeping spell on Ginny who was in the fifth year dorm.

She came down her bag with her and Harry cast the same charms on her and all three of them opened the doors of their common room and Harry also cast the aura concealing charm so that even Dumbledore would not be able to detect them and went to the potions classroom.

Today like yesterday all the Weasleys, Snape, McGonagall, Arran and Ria were listening and all of them wished Harry all the best. Harry thanked them and waited for Draco who came a moment later with Nott and Gavin the seventh year.

They silently walked leading the way and Harry, Hermione and Neville were soon at the room where Nott had met the Slytherins yesterday.

Nott opened the door and Harry, Hermione and Neville went in and saw the faces of the Slytherins who were their enemies until now.

End of Chapter – 24

Chapter – 25

There was a deafening silence as Harry, Hermione and Neville went to the same place where Nott had stood the day before speaking long and hard about why they should not be following the Dark Lord.

Harry stood uncertainly there and Hermione and Neville sat on stools on either side of him. There were a lot of cushions on which the Slytherins were sitting and staring at the boy whom they hoped would save them from what looked like a certain death even before they would finish their teens.

Nott who did not know how to extend an olive branch to the boy whom he had almost killed also sat down silently and it was left to Draco to start off with everything.

Draco cleared his throat and looked directly at Harry. He was standing next to Hermione. He walked around a little to come near where Harry was standing and he spoke softly into the oppressive yet hopeful silence.

“Potter all of us are marked.” He said bluntly and looked at Harry and the others too, watched him intently. But Harry, Hermione or Neville did not even blink their eyes as Harry nodded as if it was most obvious.

“And all of us want out.” He said baldly his lips twisting in a ghost of a smile.

Harry started at that. “That is great news. You must tell Dumbledore.”

“NO!” a shout came from everyone present.

“You must never tell the old buffoon.” Draco, Nott and the others told Harry more or less what Nott had told the Slytherins yesterday.

“So you see Potter why the pure bloods are so keen to keep away from the so called Light. There is no restriction on Granger to tell anyone about our world. Hell there is no restriction on her parents. If

any parent or any muggleborn or half blood takes it into their heads and bring the muggles in, into our war, it would be nothing short of disastrous.

"It is because of Dumbledore in the first place that most of us joined with Voldemort. He is the one who tarnished the name of our House and by extension all of us who were sorted into that House. We had no choice but to serve the Dark or be severely left alone in isolation."

Harry started pacing the room as he sought answers. "What is your take on muggleborns?" Hermione asked them softly.

"We hate them and don't want them but only because they scare us. They interact with both worlds and that is where the fear lies. Otherwise they are as magical as me and Longbottom, Granger. *You are as magical as me.* But there must be a way to prevent you from speaking about us other than the stupid International Statute of Secrecy that comes into play only after the damage is done. The Ministry sends its people a little later to punish. They come pompously a little later to oblivate, but what if someone runs off with the information or something like that?" Nott told her.

"We need you to breed because you bring in fresh blood Granger. That is the truth whatever anybody else may tell you. What we don't need is the interaction with your side of the family because we are paranoid we will be found out." Bornis told her bluntly.

"And squibs?" she asked.

It was Nott who answered her. "We used the squibs to marry and bring in new blood. But we are asking Potter for help and that means we have to be okay with the muggleborns and the rate Voldemort is going on we will be reduced to marrying muggles and it is far better to marry muggleborns rather than marry muggles." He finished bluntly.

"Tell us you will strive honestly about preventing muggleborns from exposing our world and their families be stopped somehow to give away any information about the Wizarding World and the muggleborns would be the most sought after, Granger, as they bring in fresh blood and stronger magic. But with the things the way they are, muggleborns are seen as a threat to our world and nothing more.

"This is what the Dark Lord used to gather all his followers. What he did not say was the sheer number of muggles and also just how impossible it would be for us to kill them and how dangerous it is to even interact with them on a daily basis even if it is only to kill them." Nott finished bitterly.

Harry stared at him as Hermione took out a parchment and started writing down points. Nott was looking at her in mild alarm and Harry grinned to himself as he readied himself to speak.

Harry had stopped pacing the floor and now he came to stand in front of them and he cleared his throat and looked around. All of them were sitting straight and looking back at him with an intensity in their eyes that was a little frightening. Harry cleared his throat once again and spoke to them in a soft but a clear voice.

"I want an oath on your magic that you will not harm muggles and muggleborns ever. If you are sent out in there service of Voldemort you may not have a choice but you will promise that all of you will not kill them for the sake of killing. You will not seek revenge if any member of your family whom you know is dark and is in the service of Voldemort or is even accidentally killed by us or the Light side, even Dumbledore, because this is war."

"So mote it be." Nott said and a swirl of golden came out from his wand and went to Harry and floated gently waiting for him to accept. Harry gaped at Nott; he was really desperate, he had not even asked what Harry would do in return.

"I accept." Harry said firmly and then all the Slytherins came and gave him their oath. Draco who was the last stopped before he took the oath. "What will you do for us in return Potter?"

All the Slytherins gasped. They were so terrified and so grateful someone would be there for them they had not even questioned what they will be promised in return.

"I will help you all to the best of my ability and that means keeping you out of Azkaban and allowing you to get along with your lives any way you please unless you turn violent. I will make sure to the best of my ability that the marks you bear will not affect your daily life in any

way or in any way bring down the respect of your family name in any manner.

“I will also not inform Dumbledore, the Order of the Phoenix or the Ministry about your leanings in the war without your permission unless life threatening.”

The Slytherins were gob smacked and watched as Draco gave his oath and then all of them sat down. Draco patted the cushion next to him for Harry, Pansy for Hermione and Neville sat down next to Harry.

Harry then detailed all that they could do to prevent muggleborns and muggles to be killed. “Not that you can kill off all the muggles. Nott was speaking only about the ratio in terms of population. What he does not know is the muggles are more powerful in terms of weaponry. They have bombs that they can release with a touch of a button, you know bombs like dung bombs only these do not emit smells they annihilate everything around them. A single bomb can destroy Diagon Alley to only rubble.”

Then Hermione and Harry told them just why the wizards should stay clear of the muggles scaring those there. “You know you guys have the right idea. I think we should restrict the information about us to the muggle world.”

The Slytherins stared at Hermione while Draco smirked inside as the Slytherins were getting a taste of Hermione and her drive.

“You a muggleborn think that?” Bulstrode asked her unable to believe she was hearing something like this.

“Of course.” Hermione said coolly. “While I feel any one who has magical ability must be encouraged to live here in the magical world, the parents and the other muggle siblings must be spelled to keep the secret so that there will be no threat of anyone intending to harm our world can access to it. While my parents are loving and very supportive, there are so many,” Hermione flashed a look at Harry who smiled at her, “who see us as a threat and treat us as freaks. That should never be allowed to discuss about us and to stop that from happening; they should be either obliterated or spelled to stop from speaking about it in a degrading manner after a few drinks at a party.”

She stopped there to take a deep breath and a 'Wow!' came from most of their lips.

Then they sat down and discussed all that they could do to still be a death eater and still not be a true one. It was six in the morning that Snape broke up the party by calling Harry's attention to the time. Hermione had by then filled many pages and the Slytherins were beginning to get scared of her and her organizational capacity.

"Potter is Granger always like this?" Bulstrode asked Harry as Draco and Pansy stifled their snickers. All of them watched Hermione who was talking to Nott and the other seventh year Slytherins explaining point after point about muggleborns and squibs that Harry was sure they were seeing stars.

"She is being very polite Bulstrode. When she is on warpath as she is when she is immersed in her pet schemes or exams that is when she is truly frightening." Harry told her his voice just loud enough to carry.

She heard it and blushed and not really caring about Harry's sarcasm she shrugged it off with a glare before turning to the others. "Sorry. Did I frighten you all?"

All of them shook their heads so vigorously that Harry was tempted to laugh. "Come on Hermione, let's go."

Hermione then took out a square bit of parchment and handed it over everyone there binding it to them with a neat flick of her wand. "There you are. All of you have parchments in which you can write anything you want. Just affix the name of the person you wish to speak to in this group and the words will appear on their parchment. To wipe it off just touch your parchments with your wand and it will disappear.

"This way you can communicate any information of importance to the three of us. I have our parchments with us and I will hand over Harry's and Neville's to them today. Alright?" the Slytherins nodded silently totally dazed at the preparation Hermione had been up to for all eventualities as she told them with a smile. She handed over the parchments to everyone and Draco, Harry Neville snickered and then went silent as Hermione turned to glare at them.

“You must carry on for the month of June like this and hope there are no casualties. I will be free only on the 31st of July when I turn seventeen and will be able to perform magic without restriction. I will contact all of you within a week after that okay? We will start all the positive action from then.” Harry told them as they prepared to leave.

They cast their charms once again and Harry, Hermione and Neville who had been very quiet through the whole exercise, left. Neville had been watching Harry as he spoke to the Slytherins and he felt he learnt more about the war in that one night than in all the years put together.

He saw Harry willing to work his way through fears and prejudices and patiently explain everything along with Hermione to all of them and he felt so proud he was Harry’s friend and that he had given a vow to fight along with Harry and not betray him.

They went without incident to the Tower and crept in. No one had got up as there were no classes and Harry removed all their charms and bidding Hermione a good morning Harry and Neville went silently to their dorm to sleep, promising to speak with the others in Harry’s side the next day.

Dumbledore had been planning to talk to Harry the next morning but to his surprise no one in Harry’s dorm came down before lunch as they did the day before.

All of them came down at lunch and Harry noticed that Harry now-a-days especially after the attack by the dementors was interacting very little with Ron. He could pick up no conversations in the dorm. It was like Harry knew about the charms he had placed.

But that was impossible. Ron did not know about them and if Harry had known he would never be as friendly with him as he was now. But then Harry was not very friendly with anyone except Hermione since the fiasco at the Department of Mysteries last year. He was broody and very silent the Weasley brother and sister told him.

Since the dementors came into the School, and the day after Ron and Ginny placed the imperious on Harry, Dumbledore realized that Harry always had Hermione and Neville sticking to him like glue. His eyes widened in realization as he thought back to the last few months.

Yes, Ron still sat on one side and Hermione on the other side of Harry but that was all. Neville sat in front of Harry and with Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan the conversations very never between the trio. It was between the six of them and Harry finished every meal as if he was late for something or the other and as they left the Great Hall, Ron was somehow maneuvered to walk with Hermione and Harry walked in the middle between Hermione and Neville.

Dumbledore was alarmed and he frowned as he thought rapidly of the consequences of Harry's actions. In Easter Harry had flat out refused to go to The Burrow and it was a day later that Arthur came with the news that he wanted to leave for Romania.

Dumbledore breathing quickened as he thought of the implications of that and he wondered just what was happening with Harry in the last one year. He sent word for Harry to meet him at his office after lunch to speak to him about his holidays.

Harry came up in ten minutes his face calm and serene. Dumbledore smiled at him and asked him to sit down.

"Well Harry this year I have not seen you as much as I would usually." He smiled.

"Yes Sir. You are always busy and this year with Runes and studying hard to make up for the last five years had made me busy as well." Harry smiled back at the Headmaster.

"You have not asked me about any holiday plans so far Harry?"

"Well Sir I to be honest, I thought you will tell me before School ends as you have been doing so every year. I did not ask you anything because I have to go to Privet Drive until I am seventeen, anyway. I know there isn't any way around that. Believe me I talked enough to

Ron and Hermione about it.” Harry said a little sulkily and Dumbledore relaxed.

He remembered Ron telling him that for the past month Harry was constantly talking about the ways and means to avoid going back and Hermione had been stressing the importance of listening to Dumbledore. Ron had been sympathetic but that was all as for him to agree to Hermione would be out of character.

Harry was still feeling guilty about Sirius and that must be the reason why he was not as lively as he was. Plus meeting Voldemort and seeing him do the damage almost everyday must have made him more responsible. Dumbledore thought as he smiled at the boy in front of him.

“Harry you must go to Privet Drive,” and Dumbledore smiled when Harry’s look turned sulky before he nodded in resigned acceptance. “You may stay there until the 31st of July and on that day in the evening you will be picked up by me and we will take it on from there. You need to accept Sirius’s inheritance that you received so that no one else from the surviving Black members may lay their claim on it.”

Harry swallowed hard and visibly as he nodded apparently unable to speak.

“Until then Harry I wish you to stay within the wards. This time the Order are needed to fight the attacks that you have been no doubt been reading about in The Daily Prophet everyday. I need you to assure me that you will not leave without asking me through Mrs. Figg. That block is safe for you to move about but not further than that. Not even the park.”

Harry nodded solemnly. “I will Sir. I never do anything more foolish as I did before.”

Dumbledore smiled at Harry’s response. “Well then off with you. I will see you on your birthday.”

Harry smiled back at Dumbledore and left his office and went to the nearest bathroom, where he told everyone what Dumbledore had said and then Harry and 'The Gang' spent another happy day before

Harry and Hermione went to pack. Harry and Ron and Neville packed in silence and then went down and passed an uneventful day and the next morning they were ready to leave.

The train ride to King's Cross also passed in a lot of laughter and silly jokes that everyone was indulging in, trying to forget the horrors that lay in the outside world. Malfoy and his goons did not come and no one commented on it. Ginny had no place to sit in Harry's compartment and she had to go to sit with her own friends. She was very sulky and spent the rest of the train ride in silence.

Mrs. Weasley, Bill, Remus Lupin, Tonks and Moody were there to receive them and Harry saw that his aunt and uncle had not come to the station to pick him up. Mrs. Weasley hugged Harry and Hermione after Ron and Ginny and she was a little shocked that Bill had not even said a word of greeting to them.

She frowned as he greeted Harry and Hermione and smiled at Neville who had been given an earring the day before by Snape and had been welcomed to Harry's side by everyone else. That gesture had overwhelmed him and now he grinned back at Bill.

Not showing anything on the outside, Molly meant to talk to her eldest son about his poor behavior with his brother and sister. The Order members in the meantime had planned to apparate with Harry to Privet Drive and leave him there.

They had learnt apparition this year and Harry had his certificate as did everyone else, only he could not apparate legally until he was seventeen. So he was planning to do a side-along with one of the Order members.

Harry had not seen Lupin for almost a year and he looked at him now as Lupin came forward to take his hand. He seemed to have healed and though Harry had not even received a note from him, he knew that Lupin had been enquiring after him genuinely at every Order meeting. He was frowning now though and he visibly relaxed as he saw the confusion in Harry's eyes and face.

"Hello Harry, how are you?"

“Fine professor and you?” Harry asked him.

“Fine at last Harry. I am sorry I have not sent you a note before because I wished to discuss a few things with you in person. I will do so when we meet after your birthday.”

“That sounds ominous.” Harry joked and watched as Lupin’s face flushed with shame?

Then the moment passed and Lupin nodded. “Indeed, it is. But that is for later and now I have the unpleasant duty to drop you off at Privet Drive.”

Harry pouted and smiled as Lupin laughed and ruffled his hair and his hands stopped and stilled for a moment and he frowned. Harry who had been slapping his hands away did not notice the frown and a second later Lupin was smiling as well.

Harry said his goodbyes to the Weasleys and Hermione and Neville and shook hands with his formidable Gran and turned to Lupin to be apparated to Privet Drive.

“Come on Harry come close.” Moody had already left for Privet Drive and Lupin deeply breathed into Harry’s scent as they apparated and was almost snarling in anger. It was a few days before the full moon and he could smell Snape all over Harry.

Lupin controlled himself and smiled at Harry as Moody took charge. They had disillusioned themselves and now with a notice-me-not charm on, all of them walked to the front door and knocked.

Petunia opened the door and at the same time Moody cancelled the disillusion charms on all of them and she shrieked and stepped inside.

Lupin who was fuming went inside along with Harry. “We will be coming for Harry on the 31st of July. After which he will never return here. Until then he will stay here.” Moody told them gruffly as Harry watched in silence.

“From his birthday Harry is legally of age in the Wizarding World and that means he can use magic. I hope you will treat him well.” Lupin

told them softly and watched with satisfaction as Petunia squeaked in understanding and she stared at Harry in loathing and fear.

Moody scowled at Lupin and then telling Harry not to leave the wards and ordering Petunia not to send him anywhere outside the block, Moody apparated away.

Lupin smiled at Harry and told him to be careful and glaring and actually growling at Petunia that sent the shivers down her spine, he and Tonks apparated away.

Harry went upstairs to put his trunk away and came down to see his aunt standing in the same position.

“Aunt Petunia?”

She turned to him and looked at him in distrust and fear. “You can do magic after your birthday?”

“Yes.” Harry nodded, “But I will not perform magic on any of you. Professor Dumbledore will not like it.”

She nodded, “You need not do any work boy! Just keep away. I will bring your meals to you in your room and you may not come out except to use the bathroom. Is that understood? I will also tell Vernon and Dudley not to disturb you and you in turn will not disturb us.”

“Fine Aunt Petunia.” And Harry went upstairs.

He had a whole compartment of food shrunk and with a stasis charm and also a heating spell. He only had to touch a small dot on the particular food packet and it would enlarge and also become piping hot. There was even hot coffee and cold pumpkin juice and chilled butterbeer. Harry settled down comfortably to study for the next one month and a bit.

Lupin was enraged and not able to speak as he apparated along with Tonks. Only he did not go to Grimmauld Place as they had planned but to Hogwarts. He went inside and met Dumbledore and asked him

if he could speak to Snape and ask him to brew the wolfsbane potion for him from this month as last month had been a little hard.

Dumbledore had smilingly agreed and knew that Lupin had regularly asked him to brew and Snape had refused since last year. He watched Lupin go to the dungeons not realizing Lupin was very close to giving the wolf control.

Lupin walked swiftly and was soon standing in front of the dungeons. He knocked sharply and went inside without waiting for an answer. Snape was about to sneer at him when he saw the amber of his eyes and stopped and stepped away warily. He coughed slightly and activated the earring calling Minerva, before he was blasted away by Lupin.

Snape hit the wall and he heard McGonagall asking him sharply what the matter was as she almost ran towards the dungeons.

"I would have killed you and then asked you questions *Snivellus*," Lupin sneered at Snape who was not even trying to pick himself up from the floor. His eyes though clouded with pain were still alert and he stayed silent as Lupin spoke more, "but there could be a good enough reason that I am unable to comprehend, for my senses smelling your nasty smell all over Harry, from head to toe."

"And," the snarl increased, "I smell him all over you. What is happening here?" Lupin asked Snape in such a controlled voice that held so much anger and rage that Snape shivered.

Snape's eyes widened as Lupin finished and he cursed Harry for not de-scenting himself when he left and cursed himself even more. Harry had been there early morning just after breakfast and had hugged him very fiercely telling Snape to take care as there would be practically no communication once Harry reached his Aunt's home.

Dumbledore had told Snape he had placed additional spells to check Harry's wellbeing because the Order could not have anyone round the clock there this month.

So Harry had instructions not to use even the parchment unless it was life threatening and he was also not to go out anywhere. Harry

had agreed only because he would be free man a day before his birthday.

At that time Minerva came in and Lupin whirled to blast whoever it was and in that moment Snape put all his power into the stunner that he sent towards Lupin.

Lupin fell like a stone and Snape left him there to go very shakily to his potions store and take a few potions to feel better. McGonagall in the mean time bound him in ropes and then enervated him. The moment he awoke Lupin screamed.

“Minerva! This gutter rat is behaving wrongly with Harry. Bind me and take me away that is fine, but his smell is overwhelmingly on Harry. Unless Snape is Harry’s soul mate, please demand an explanation for this. Please.”

McGonagall looked at Lupin for a long moment and then started warding the room and also cast many spy spells.

“I am taking a great risk in trusting you and it is not just your closeness with Sirius that is making me tell you this but the fact you were going to explain to Harry the reason for your aloofness this past year.”

Lupin frowned as he tried to make sense of her cryptic statement.

“Yes, Minerva I told you I will explain to Harry. In fact I told him at the station I have something very important to tell him once he comes to Grimmauld Place. But what has that got to do with this filth. Harry is old enough to be your son damn you.” Lupin shouted.

“And he is my son, wolf in every way except that I did not father him with Evans.” Snape replied coldly, standing very far away at the other end of the room as Lupin gaped at him his jaw open and hitting the floor.

“What?” Lupin asked Snape faintly.

McGonagall distracted Lupin by telling him briefly about Harry hearing him at the Order meeting and was rewarded by a look of intense

shame, "So my talk to explain to Harry will not be heard by him." He said sadly the air going out of him. He looked very pathetic and sad as he sat on the floor bound and uncomfortable. "So I have lost Harry too, because of the wolf."

McGonagall felt incredibly sad for him as she knelt down. "Remus, Harry understood why you had stayed away and he realizes you did because of the wolf in you. He understands and has already forgiven you." She told him softly.

Lupin raised sad eyes to her. "Why should he forgive me Minerva? I was despicable, I still am."

"Because Harry understands." She said simply.

Lupin looked down as he tried to blink the tears away. He was not wholly successful as they coursed down his cheeks in shame and self disgust. It was some time later he asked the question Snape and McGonagall were waiting for.

"But how did he hear?" he asked looking up unable to even wipe his eyes as he was still tightly bound.

"We will answer that tonight Remus. Severus will take you to a secret place and there you will know everything. Until then I am afraid I cannot let you out so stupefy!"

Lupin fell over and Snape transfigured him into a small wolf and put him into his pocket and McGonagall fled to her office from Snape's rooms. A few hours later Snape and McGonagall left the castle at different times to meet at the cottage. Snape arrived first took out the wolf and transfigured him once more into Lupin.

Lupin blinked his eyes and glared at Snape but did not say anything more. They waited in silence until McGonagall arrived and by then Snape had secured the doors and had locked them using ancient magic and had stopped the outgoing floo in the living room the moment McGonagall arrived. Then Snape brought out his pensieve to show him all that happened.

“Before I start Lupin send word to Tonks that you are safe and you need some time alone. This will take the whole of the night and even go on tomorrow because we have much to discuss after you see what we are going to show you here.” Snape told him his voice still cold.

Lupin looked for a moment at McGonagall and then nodded his head at Snape. Snape untied him and Lupin sent word to Tonks and then Snape started the memories.

A long time later the memories came to a finish and Snape glancing warily at the growling Remus went to the pensieve to place all the memories in his head once again when he heard an enraged growl and he turned sharply and stopped horrified.

Lupin had transformed. Snape watched petrified as the wolf emerged for the first time without the full moon and McGonagall ran back to the other end of the room while Snape was transported to the dreadful day so many years ago when he encountered a fully grown werewolf.

But they need not have worried because the werewolf was not even looking at them. It was howling loudly making Snape and McGonagall terrified and it had gone straight for the door and stopped when one bang did not smash the door down. It stopped there and turned towards Snape and was about to pounce on him when it stopped and seemed to realize this man had saved Harry.

So the werewolf turned and looked for a second at a trembling McGonagall and then with an enraged roar ran and banged the door once again. The whole cottage shuddered at the impact and had Snape not sealed it with such powerful magic the cottage would have fallen on them.

Now Lupin was ignoring them and was howling terrifyingly loudly, banging continuously at the door and it would have blown away had it not been secured by ancient magic. Blood was sprouting from him as he hit the door straight on every time. The superior strength of the enraged werewolf made the doors shudder ominously each time Lupin ran and tried to smash the doors open and they would have fallen down in a few minutes ancient magic or not when McGonagall came to her senses first.

“Hit him Severus! NOW!” McGonagall screamed as the werewolf turned to run at the doors again, Snape came to his senses and hit two powerful stunners one after one rapidly at it. Combined with McGonagall’s three stunners the wolf finally crumpled.

Snape wasted no time and securely bound the wolf in thick ropes, chains and bound him with ancient magic. Then with a slightly shaking hand Snape enervated the wolf.

Snape and McGonagall had been shocked to the extent Remus Lupin had gone to take revenge on Dumbledore and Moody. Snape had been keeping a watch on him and he showed the memory of the second meeting that took place after the Order meeting last year only at the very end.

Lupin had seen that and the moment Moody and Dumbledore had expressed their gladness about Sirius’s death Lupin had started growling. He transformed completely when he realized how much Sirius and Harry had lost and how much Harry had suppressed inside him and the urge to rip Dumbledore and Moody into shreds completely took over him as he realized their aim of taking over Harry’s money and then killing Harry by releasing Harry’s magic when he would meet Voldemort.

The moment Snape enervated him, Lupin started growling and straining against the chains and ropes, snarling at McGonagall who first shot a silencing charm on him and then she shouted at him, “Remus are you mad change back right now, otherwise all that we have done so far will be in vain.

“Yes! Albus is responsible for so many things but charging at him like this will not help. He will kill you and Harry will blame himself about your death as well. Instead join with us and help us and Harry to win over not only Voldemort but Albus and the Ministry as well.

“Remember Arthur is still not showing his dislike of the Headmaster and his three children and you know what they did.”

At that time the fire turned green and Arran stepped into the room and looked warily at the wolf.

Remus looked at Arran in shock and a minute later he changed back staring at him like Harry had done, drinking his features in, seeing a face he had thought he would never see again. Tears flowed from his eyes as he saw the Sirius look alike and turned to Snape who had called for Arran to come in at once, while McGonagall was shouting at Lupin.

“Sirius,” he whispered. “He looks so much like Sirius.” He said to no one and all of them stood transfixed, their wands still held on alert. Snape removed the ropes and the chains with a flick and a chant and Lupin went close to Arran and touched him in wonder.

Then just like Harry did, he blushed and let his hand fall down and stepped away. “I am very sorry Minerva. I just saw red, he could have saved Sirius and given Harry a great childhood and made him strong and still used Harry to defeat Voldemort with Sirius still alive. None of us would have disagreed with him. Not Sirius and definitely not Harry. But to do this...” Lupin said heavily as he sat down on the floor his head in his hands.

“Tell me,” he said after sometime as he slowly lifted his head and found the other three watching him warily and smiled wryly, “I am fine, although I feel I have betrayed Sirius, James and Lily and Harry.”

“Give me your oath to protect Harry Lupin and we will tell you all our plans.” Snape told him still shaky inside but looking almost normal outside.

“I Remus John Lupin swear on my magic to protect Harry with my life and never reveal anything I have seen here to anyone without Harry’s consent. I also swear on my magic to do my utmost to help Harry in his war and help him in the rebuilding of our world.”

The golden swirl of magic swirled around and went to Harry in Privet Drive and Snape activated the earring only to tell Harry to accept it. Harry did and the magic went into him. Snape confirmed it and shut off the connection once Harry hummed to signify he had said only the words ‘I accept’ very softly and nothing more and set to making an earring for Lupin and taught him to use that.

Lupin kept glancing at Arran and every time Arran smiled, Lupin blushed and turned away. Snape rolled his eyes, "Harry was like you too. In fact he called Arran Sirius at first and was somehow convinced Black had come back from the veil."

Lupin nodded as he thought about that memory. They were in the early hours of the morning and Snape, McGonagall and Arran filled him up on everything and told him the plans Harry had made once his stay at Privet Drive was over.

Lupin nodded approvingly and then he and Arran started a conversation about the werewolves and how to wean them away from Fenrir Greyback who was controlling them now and he was with Voldemort.

They spent the rest of the next day talking about various issues and how to approach them and McGonagall left early in the morning arriving at breakfast and Snape arriving at Hogwarts well after tea.

End of Chapter – 25

Chapter – 26

It was the twenty ninth of July. Two days before Harry's birthday, when he would become a legal adult in the Wizarding World. It was five minutes to midnight and Harry was waiting restlessly.

Sharp at 12.01a.m on the thirtieth of July a day before Harry's birthday, a group of goblins came to No. 4 Privet Drive. They looked through the wards and the spells on the house and the gardens and then laid out a complicated goblin charm that made the place and the Dursleys invisible to all wizards except one Harry Potter, on whom they tied the wards to.

The muggles would be able to see them and their home and interact with them but they would become invisible for a wizard or a witch.

The goblins then brought the wards Dumbledore had placed there crashing down and silently apparated away. After they left, Harry went upstairs and woke up the Dursleys.

He had his wand in his hand and simply pointed it in their face and told them to come down.

Vernon turned an alarming shade of purple and green that Harry thought did not look very well on him. His aunt was so pale she could have passed on for a vampire and Dudley was holding his bottoms in his hands a feat he was not successful because his buttocks were far bigger than his hands. He was behind his mother, his eyes looking fearfully at Harry.

Harry pushed the sofa towards them and they watched as the sofa zoomed and then lifted high in the air above them and then came down gently and settled down behind them.

The Dursleys squeaked and squealed in horror and they did not notice a sudden flick of Harry's wand that threw them on to the sofa. Harry then cast the silencing charm at them and froze them to their necks.

“Now I need a few minutes of your time and then I will be going away from this place forever. I will not take very well to yelling or shouting Aunt and Uncle, so if you do need to speak at all it had better be polite and relevant. Now I am going to remove the silencing charm on all of you and then I will begin to explain. Is that fine? You may nod your heads if it is so or shake your heads in which case I will leave you as you are.”

There were nodding like there was no tomorrow. Harry laughed to himself as he removed the silencing charm off his relatives.

“Well! That was very nice of you to cooperate.” Harry told them with a straight face and watched with interest as his uncle started turning red and then grey as he reigned in the words that were begging to come out of his lips. But the fact Harry had his wand and had used it to cast spells and had no letter from an owl that came crashing down and no visits from the other freaks made him pause and tell the begging words to stuff it.

“That is clever of you Uncle Vernon.” Harry nodded his head indicating his Uncle’s intelligence in swallowing the retort, and he flicked his wand and conjured a lovely chair and sat down opposite them.

“Now I am going to be seventeen years and in the Wizarding World I come of age at that time. I have no ill feeling towards any of you though Aunt Petunia, if the positions were reversed and it was Dudley who had no one else except his aunt and uncle on his mother’s side to take care of him, my mother would not have placed him under the cupboard beneath the stairs.

“But all that is now in the past. What isn’t past though is the threat of Voldemort. He has come back alive and he is killing muggles and everyone really, simply because he can. He hates me and he is looking out for all of you because I lived with you all these years.”

All the Dursleys squealed and went pale.

“I have with the help of the goblins cast a very powerful spell on the house and on all three of you that makes you invisible to any person who is magical. That means your house will be visible and all of you

will be visible to non magical people, but if any magical person comes along, they will not be able to see you except me because the spells are tied to me.

“Please do not sell this house unless the war in the Wizarding World is over. You are reading everyday about random attacks are you not? They are attacks by Voldemort on the muggles whom he hates. Once the war is over and if I am alive at the end of it, then I will come only once and remove all the spells and then we will never meet again.

“If I die you will know as I have asked the goblins to inform you, you must move away from this place as my death will make you visible to all. I have finished. Have you any questions now?”

The Dursleys looked terrified. “Oh! Mrs. Figg is a squib and so she will not be able to see you.” Harry told them and waited patiently as Vernon snarled and then swallowed as his wife nudged him warningly. To think the cat woman was one of them was a bit too much for Vernon Dursley because they had left Harry with her most of the time.

Harry then took out a draft. It was a draft made out to Petunia Dursley for a million pounds. He summoned the small coffee table and laid the draft on top of it.

“My parents’ were extremely wealthy and my Godfather who died last year was equally so. He willed all his wealth to me. I realize I was a burden and a shame to you all these years, but you gave me a roof over my head and food to eat so that I would not die of starvation. Thank you for that and as a small repayment I have a draft here for a million pounds.

“If all goes well I will see you one more time to remove the spells after Voldemort is gone. Otherwise please take care of yourselves. If you need to get in touch with me anytime, kindly address a letter to Harry Potter c/o The Rose Cottage and I will get it. Goodbye.” Harry finished quietly and he flicked his wand and removed the charm from them. To his surprise no one went to take the draft from the table. They were staring at him in shock.

Harry shrugged his shoulders and checked for his trunk that he had shrunk and placed in his robes and turning around he left the Dursleys silently forever.

Harry apparated straight to the cottage where Snape was waiting for him. Harry was feeling a bit drained and Snape took one look at him and hugged him fiercely and made him feel a lot better. Over a cup of tea Snape told Harry about what had happened with Lupin and the events in the past month. Harry was shocked when he heard that Lupin had transformed without the moon and he had almost broken through the ancient magic that Snape had cast on the door.

Harry's heart lifted with the fact that his father's friend had forgiven him and was on his side now.

Snape was supposedly at a raid with a new recruit and he had killed the death eater and had come here to wait for Harry. The others were fighting all over the place as was the case now-a-days.

Snape had heard all that Harry had spoken and he felt so proud of Harry's mature way of dealing with the Dursleys. Harry himself was surprised but now that he had Snape, the Dursleys did not hurt as before. Harry and Snape then left for Godric's Hollow.

The goblins had done a wonderful job of repairing it and the small village nestled in the Welsh mountains was simply beautiful. Harry and Snape stood there in the night enjoying the beauty of the village for a moment.

Harry could see the house and then he told Snape who could not see it because it was under the Fidelus charm. *Harry Potter lives in Godric's Hollow* and suddenly Snape saw the house and both of them walked in.

The house was clean and neat and there was nothing to indicate that it was the scene of horror sixteen years ago that affected not only Harry and his family but the Wizarding World at large. Harry looked around the living room of the house where he had lived the first fifteen months of his life and smiled sadly.

Snape's arm crushed him once again, giving him the comfort Harry so desperately needed. After sometime Harry walked to the fireplace to connect it by activating the floo and connecting the outgoing to Grimmauld Place and Snape's cottage and then flopped down on a sofa and relaxed.

"How big is the village?"

"Very small according to Lupin. He says there are hardly a few streets. There is a graveyard though where your parents are buried." Snape told him softly.

"He did not even let me see their graves." Harry told him bitterly not needing to specify who the 'he' was.

"But Albus is like that Harry. For the greater good he does not mind the smaller evil. What he does not realize is that it puts him on par with the Dark Lord."

Five minutes later Harry got up and went to look around his home. The main door opened directly into the living room and there were two staircases leading to the first floor. The staircases started right at the door on both sides. There were five bedrooms on the first floor and the second floor was divided into a massive library on one side and more bedrooms on the other.

On the first floor was the master bedroom and the goblins had repaired everything and anything personal they had kept for Harry to see and then throw away, even if anything was slightly charred or damaged.

The ground floor consisted of the living room, a dining room, a study cum office room. Harry walked around the house alone. Snape was sitting on the sofa giving Harry the time to feel the place where he had lived with his parents. Harry roamed through the house twice and at last went to the library. There were a lot of books that had preservation charms and were apparently bound to the house as they seemed to have survived not only the attack but also seemed to be in a good condition.

Harry walked around the library. There were portraits of Hogwarts showing the Entrance Hall and her massive grounds, of the library at Hogwarts, Harry smiled as he saw that; it must have been his mother who had done that and of Godric's Hollow and the other Potter residences as well. He turned the last corner of the library and his heart stopped as he came across five portraits.

His mother, father, Sirius, Remus and the rat. Harry blasted the rat straight away and watched with satisfaction as the portrait burned to a crisp. He looked at his parents who were smiling and waving and Sirius for a long time until Snape came searching for him.

His mother was holding him in her hands and was pressing the baby Harry with kisses and his baby self was sitting smugly on her and enjoying the kisses and giggling when she tickled him.

Snape felt so moved at the longing in Harry's face as he looked at his baby self and his mother's kisses all over his baby self. But Harry also healed a lot as he saw firm evidence he had been loved and loved a lot.

Snape came up to him and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder making him start with surprise. He saw Snape and smiled sadly. "They are not portraits like that of Phineas Nigellus and other Headmasters in Dumbledore's office, those that can speak I mean?"

Snape frowned thoughtfully. "They could be. It all depends Harry, if your parents made these portraits with a spell to include their memories and also make them self updating, that means saying the spell everyday and updating the portrait that is usually bound to the witch or wizard; then yes each portrait would know everything up to the day they died. Even Black would have if he had said the spell a day before his death; he would have still known everything of his life until then."

"How will I know?"

"Well usually they are meant to activate on their death. Your parents and Black would have done something like that I am sure. Only I do not know if this is the portrait that is meant to contain their memories or they had others that were destroyed."

Suddenly Harry had an idea. He pointed his wand at his mother's portrait and said, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." And heard Snape snort. Then Harry forgot everything as his mother blinked her eyes and looked around.

Harry watched breathlessly as she looked around and then saw him, "James!" she whispered. "You survived." She breathed and then she frowned as she took in the trembling boy with eyes as green as hers and who was clinging to, it wasn't Severus Snape the death eater surely, of all people for support and her eyes widened.

"Harry?" she asked incredulously as she stared at him. Harry could not say a word to save his life as he looked at her tears falling out of his eyes that were bright, very bright as he drank in her features and her voice that sounded so melodious to his ears, he had heard that voice only screaming in despair until now when Lily Potter had begged for the life of her son.

Now her voice was the most amazing thing Harry felt he had heard. Snape was holding tightly on to him and Harry's fingers were stopping the circulation in his arm.

Snape pointed his wand and spoke the same words to the portraits of James and Sirius and Remus. *His* portrait would be the same like wizarding portraits that could move a little because Remus was still alive.

Harry was still staring at his mother when, "Harry you are alright, thank Merlin!" shouted the portrait of Sirius from James's right. Sirius had updated everyday apparently.

Harry whipped around to hear the voice of his beloved Godfather, a voice he had thought he would have to hear only by listening to Arran and be satisfied in this lifetime.

Sirius, a very young Sirius was grinning at him, his eyes drinking Harry in, in the same manner Harry was devouring him with his eyes that were a little blurred because of the tears.

"Silly! Wipe your tears." Sirius told him, brushing his own eyes and was diverted by a new voice, "James!" Sirius hollered as James

Potter looked at his only son with wonder, "Harry is that really you? But why is Snape with you and not Sirius?" he heard Sirius's shout next to him at that time and he turned to look at Sirius who was grinning at James with tears in his eyes and James turned to Harry in alarm. "Why is Sirius here with me?"

Then and only then did Lily and Sirius spot Snape standing very close to Harry. Before any of them could say a word Harry spoke quickly. "See, all of you there is so much you have missed. I will be seventeen tomorrow. That is close to sixteen years. Sirius fell into the veil last year. In that one year there has been so much that has been happening.

"Please allow me to show you everything before you say a word. Alright?"

Snape in the meantime had gone to bring his pensieve. The moment Snape came in with the pensieve, Harry went to work.

Harry and Snape removed a lot of memories and placed them into the pensieve. Snape had included his talks with Minerva and Harry's escape from Voldemort with the help of Arran and the killing of Nagini and both of them had included the destruction of the horcruxes and the fight with the dementors and Lupin's inclusion in Harry's side.

Harry also included his fight with Voldemort in his first year, the basilisk in his second, Sirius in his third, the graveyard in his fourth and the Department of Mysteries in his fifth and his meeting with the Weasleys and the imperio with Ron and Ginny. He extracted only brief moments of each year and finished off with the pranks Snape, McGonagall and Dobby had played on Ron and Ginny.

"I have placed a few memories from each year when I fought with Voldemort and the last year is shown in great detail. Please see the whole thing and then react. I will answer any question you may have. Ok?"

Not waiting for an answer Harry tapped the pensieve and James saw him go and sit by Snape who put an arm around him.

All of them saw the fight with Quirrell for not more than five minutes and the fight with the basilisk and the escape of Sirius and Pettigrew in Harry's third year. James's portrait heart almost stopped beating when he realized Sirius had been in Azkaban for thirteen years. Before he could recover from that he saw Harry standing at the graveyard and the fight with Voldemort who was returned to his body.

The next year James and Lily who was now sitting on James's lap and weeping saw the terrible fight at the Department of Mysteries and Sirius falling into the veil and Dumbledore telling the Prophecy.

Lily shrieked, she couldn't help it and Sirius was trying his best not to cry as he saw the anguish in Harry's face and voice. James was so stunned he could not feel and he did not even realize his wife was sitting on him and crying.

Then the terrible last year unfolded. They saw Harry walk into the infirmary and heard Ron reading the letter. They saw Harry attending the Order meeting and Sirius and James yelled simultaneously deafening Harry and Snape and startling them, "**Moony**" how dare he?"

They saw Snape sneering at Remus and then the Order meeting after the Order meeting. They then saw Harry telling everything to Hermione and his gratitude when she sided with him almost broke Lily's heart. James was clutching the hands of his chair so hard and he was not even aware of the tears that ran down his eyes as he shared Harry's pain. Sirius looked so shocked that he was clutching to James in desperation.

They saw Harry and Hermione planning and plotting to stay afloat in an environment that was pressing them down every second.

Then they saw McGonagall's visit to Snape in his chambers and then Snape's Occlumency lesson. Then they saw Snape telling Harry he was the one who heard the prophecy and the way Harry had yelled, power simply rolling off him and the way he broke down, broke the hearts of the three who had died so that this boy may live.

They saw Snape going and sitting with Harry and heard his story. Lily, James and Sirius did not know whom they were weeping for anymore,

Sirius felt very bitter for his brother's sake, a brother he had brushed off so callously and he was the bravest of them all.

All of them watched with bated breath as Snape agreed to become a slave to Arran to save Harry and James and Sirius turned incredulous eyes on him. They saw Wormtail being put into place as Harry and Harry escaping. They saw the way Harry had reacted to Arran and how the Slytherins had pledged to fight with Harry.

All of them saw the horcrux hunting and Arran's conversation with Harry. Sirius made a choked sound again as he heard about Regulus.

They saw the Christmas at the Weasleys and then Neville telling McGonagall about the imperious and lastly the Slytherins swearing to help Harry and then Harry meeting Lupin at the station. James and Sirius snarled as they saw Lupin frowning and then controlling himself and smiling.

The next memory was that of Snape and he was being blasted away. James and Sirius were confused as they saw Lupin fighting for Harry and they understood and were a lot pacified and shell shocked when he transformed without the moon when he saw the second Order meeting. They saw him hurling himself against the door, it was truly terrifying and how he had calmed when Arran had come and lastly the oath he took to die for Harry.

Lily, James and Sirius were now weeping for their child whom they had left so alone and vulnerable to face such horrors. Lily was inconsolable as she viewed the memories and saw Harry so skinny and so alone. That was what hit her time and again. He was so alone until Snape came and then she saw how he clung to Snape.

All of them were silent and the only sounds that were heard were that of Lily sobbing and James and Sirius clearing their throats now and then.

"What is happening to my baby James?" Lily asked a long time later. no one answered; no one was able to.

Harry in the meantime had written the secret of the house to all the others except the Slytherins whom Harry met with three days before

School finished. As Lily sobbed and James and Sirius were shell shocked about what they had seen that they were not even comforting her, there were pops of apparition and whooshing sounds as the floo kept turning green and churning out people, who searched for Harry and Snape and came up to the library searching for them.

All of them stopped at the sight of Harry's parents and Sirius with tears in their eyes and Harry looking very uncomfortable and sad. Hermione went up to him and hugged him as did Neville and Arran.

Remus saw the pensieve, shriveled up and his eyes full of shame went up to them. "I spit on your face Moony." James shouted at him.

"God James you think I wanted to! The wolf in me was killing me and it took so long for me to accept Siri's death." Remus cried in a tortured voice.

His eyes were turning amber and Remus went on not minding all the others in the room. "But that despair is nothing compared to what I feel for Albus and Moody." he started growling and the others stepped back in fear.

"Lupin! Stop that. You wish to transform here?" Snape asked him acidly.

Lupin swallowed hard and looked with shame at James and Sirius. James smiled sadly at him. "Sorry Moony. But you left Harry so alone." James's tortured voice almost killed Lupin.

"We did not give our lives so that my son would live under the cupboard and be used for his fame and money and then discarded like a ragged doll. How dare Albus?" Lily screamed, tears running down her face again.

Lupin started growling again.

"*Petrificus totalis*." Arran hit him straight on. "Remus you must control yourself. Else all that we have planned for tomorrow will be in vain."

James, Sirius and Lily stared at the young man who looked so much like Sirius and then James looked around at the strange group of

people who had chosen Harry as their leader and had pledged to fight on Harry's side.

He was suddenly proud of his son and blinked his eyes as they threatened to fill up with tears once again.

"Shall I release you and will you behave?" Arran was asking Remus and James grinned at the sight. The moment Lupin's eyes turned amber James and Sirius knew he could not help it and while they would scold him, they would also understand.

The way he had blasted Snape for what he thought was wrong behavior towards Harry and the way he had transformed after seeing the second Order meeting had redeemed Remus in James's and Sirius's eyes. The oath he took later only strengthened that belief.

"Snape?" James called out to him after whispering something to Sirius who nodded whole heartedly.

Harry suddenly became very tense as Snape raised an eyebrow towards James.

McGonagall who was thrilled to see three of her favorite students now came to stand by Snape and was ready to scold James and Sirius if they put a foot wrong and James, seeing that rolled his eyes.

Arran had released Lupin and he went to stand near the portraits. James took one look at that miserable face and grinned. The change in Lupin was startling. He straightened up and years rolled off him and he grinned back. He had been forgiven.

"Pull a stunt like that again Moony, I will come out of the bloody veil and kill you." Sirius told him, shaking his fist at him and then all was fine among the friends. They would discuss the rest in private.

James then turned to Snape and shocking the others and knelt down. "I am dead you know. But I think I am still the head of the House of Potter because Harry will respect my wishes. The House of Potter owes you a life debt, Snape that can never be fulfilled. You saved my baby and you gave him purpose and lots of love to live again. Else he would have wasted away.

"The House of Potter and the House of Black," Sirius knelt down as solemn as Harry had ever seen him, and James took out his wand and Sirius his and they touched their hearts with it signifying they were speaking only the truth, "forever holds you in the highest esteem and gratitude as it understands the extent you went to save our child when he was in the clutches of Voldemort and Dumbledore. Thank you."

Harry who was so scared that they would badmouth Snape had his jaw hit the floor. Snape was so shocked himself. He realized what James and Sirius had done. They had effectively declared him as guardian of Harry. Snape just nodded, he could not speak for the life of him

Lupin was looking so sad that he was not there for Harry. James called out to him and he and Sirius who had noticed as well spoke to him in whispers comforting him and after a while Lupin started looking almost his normal self.

Then Arran clapped his hands and brought the room to order.

"Now we have got all the important bits out of the way, let us plan for the morrow." He said gaily and that broke the tense and emotional atmosphere and all of them started talking and planning and plotting.

They spent the whole day plotting and planning and Snape was with them and refused to obey the summons of one Albus Dumbledore who had called for a frantic meeting of the Order. Snape and the Slytherins had not gone anywhere, while McGonagall and Weasleys had. They came back with news that Dumbledore did not remember where Harry's aunt's home was and he was scared for Harry.

Harry had laughed at the sarcastic account of his Head of House. She had been very happy to see James, Lily and Sirius and she had so much of the tension leave her.

Harry had dragged Hermione and had introduced her as 'my best friend' and blushed and then scowled as some one whispered 'whipped' very loudly and the whole room snickered and McGonagall snorted. James, Sirius and Lily had looked on baffled as Harry

whirled around, "Who was that? Care to come in front of me?" he asked angrily.

"Oh Harry let them be. They are sooo immature." Hermione said her nose in the air. Harry smiled at her and nodded his head, pacified as James who had caught on by then, grinned.

"They are right!" he told Harry surprised.

"What dad?" it sounded very nice Harry thought in satisfaction.

"She has you whipped." James laughed and Sirius laughed along with him while the rest snickered.

Lily looked at Harry's flushed face and Hermione's red one and smacked at her husband and Sirius. "Stop that right now. you are not kids anymore."

"Of course Lily." James snickered and McGonagall said loudly, "Now who is whipped Potter?"

"He is a mushy wushy professor." Lily told McGonagall airily as James flushed in mortification of being called mushy wushy whatever that was, while the others shouted with laughter.

Harry laughed thrilled at the conversation. This was how it was in a family. He had always dreamed of such scenes of gentle teasing and flushing with embarrassment and denying loudly.

Snape rolled his eyes and nudged Harry. Harry clapped his hands and asked for silence. James, Sirius and Lily were astounded he got it in a minute. All of them had settled down and were looking expectantly at Harry.

"Okay now we have to plan for not only taking down Voldemort and his only horcrux, but also for the aftermath of the Wizarding World. Last year we had spent much time discussing this and I have come up with a few ideas that will work during and after the war.

"The first thing we need is our own publication. I thought of the Quibbler if Mr. Lovegood is agreeable because it is already running

and we don't have to start from the beginning. Otherwise we start our own publication. We can talk with Luna and ask her if she will join us and help us by publishing a few articles that we will write. We will choose topics of blood purity, the muggles/ wizards' ratio, the meaningless killing and how Voldemort is killing not the muggles and muggleborns in large numbers but the purebloods.

"We can even name families that have so far perished. That will make the pure bloods think more carefully on their status with Voldemort and blood. The next important thing we do with the press is to say that we are with the purebloods in securing the silence of the muggleborn students in respect with the Wizarding World."

There were many gasps at that. "Bravo!" shouted Arran and Draco echoed it. "You will in effect be jerking the rug from beneath old snake face. Great Harry!" Arran beamed and everyone echoed it and James was bursting with pride as were Sirius and Lily.

"We will tell them that all the parents of the muggleborns should be spelled to stay silent. It will be for their protection as well as ours. If we phrase it rightly then the muggleborns will agree with us themselves."

Harry stopped to see the reactions and he was gratified to see all of them were impressed. Harry had not spoken about this to anyone in detail and even Snape only knew the general outlines. Lily, James and Sirius were looking so proud that Harry blushed and then continued.

"The next thing is the way the Wizarding World deals with half breeds. They are termed dark creatures and are allowed to rot and die. We will try through our writings influence the people as much as we can and push for equality for all of them."

"They will never give it Harry." Lupin told him sadly. Most of the others agreed.

"They will if we start a revolution. We stress the contribution of the goblins, the centaurs, the werewolves, the elves, both the high elves and the house elves, the vampires, the half giants, everyone really. We need all of them to maintain a magical balance. Else we could be

destroyed. Each of the so called half breed creatures has a use in society that cannot be ignored. By doing so what we are doing is pushing them to extremes, where they end up taking revenge against the wizards.

"If we present it in the correct manner, then I think we will be successful. If each creature have their own council and have say two representatives on the Wizengamot then the rights of all are taken into account. We also start a job counseling center for all the half breeds to sell our idea. At first no one will give jobs to them. So we help them to start their own small businesses by helping them with loans that they can repay leisurely.

"We also provide the wolfsbane to all werewolves at half the cost so that the fear of werewolves is lessened. That way we start the process of integrating all the half breeds into mainstream society.

"We also start a counseling center for house elves and encourage them to come to us with their problems if they are being treated unfairly. Yes initially there will be little or even negative response but slowly things may improve." Harry was awarded with a brilliant smile from Hermione and everyone rolling their eyes. This one was only for her and they were sure this would definitely not work.

"The third thing is to start a School."

"What!!!" there were many exclamations.

"Why? As a competition to Hogwarts. That will never do Harry!"

Harry clapped his hands loudly.

"No." he said flushing and smiling uncertainly at the others. Snape smiled back encouragingly at him and Harry took a deep breath and started again.

"We start a School for the children. A day School where they are taught the basics in Magic, Wizarding Culture, Math, English and Latin. We also teach them our history and feed them with the stories of old. We start them at six as they do in muggle schools but have

them six days a week instead of five. The sixth day goes in physical training and games both muggle and magical.

“What this will do is develop friendships at a very young level and since there will be no sorting the friendships will be among all children. When they attend Hogwarts they will not shrink away from the Slytherin or hope only to be a Gryffindor or look down upon Hufflepuff.

“Five years together will make them see each other in a different light even after they go to Hogwarts. The other thing this will do is it will raise the muggleborns to the same level as the pure bloods and those half bloods who are living in the magical world.

“They will become a part of it completely and wholly by the time they are eleven. Since we will invite the pure bloods as well to the School, there will be interaction among all sections of society as well as I hope understanding.”

There was silence for a minute and then Arran stood up and started clapping. Harry blushed when the others stood up and started clapping as well.

A minute later Harry shouted, “Thanks a lot. But I have not finished. Next we start a wizarding academy or university.”

The others were silent and sat down again and allowed Harry to speak.

“A wizarding university to specialize in all subjects including the Dark Arts and Blood Magic. That would make the pure bloods think favorably about it. we deal with all types of subjects and specialize in them, from ancient magic, to history, from Arithmancy to spell crafting to the forgotten arts.

“We will then create a better standard at all levels in our world.

“The last thing I wish to do is to start an orphanage for all the boys and girls who have lost their parents in this war and also for any muggle born who is shunned at home or squibs or werewolves who are not wanted by the aristocratic pure bloods.”

Harry flushed as the silence was deafening and then Lily's sob broke through it. "Yes Harry, do this. If there was a good orphanage you would have been better off there than with Tuney."

Harry smiled nervously as he looked at his mother who had now controlled her self and smiled back brilliantly at him. He turned to the others and smiled when all of them whooped loudly making him laugh in relief.

"We could have the School attached to the orphanage also. There are so many possibilities. That is all. What do you guys think? Can we do all this?"

Snape stood up and went to Harry and hugged him fiercely. "You bet child. I will do this with you if it is the last thing I ever do."

"Me too, me too." Shouted everyone.

"But Harry all this costs a lot of money. Even if all of us contributed say half our pay it will still not be enough." Arthur told him worriedly. "What I suggest is the press, and the orphanage. The rest will come whenever we can find the cash. What do you all say are all of you willing to pay?"

"Yes!" came the unanimous shouts.

Harry gaped at Arthur. He was willing to give up half his pay? The Twins, who had been mostly silent especially after the imperious stunts by their siblings, nodded and so did Bill. Draco was nodding too.

"I have money I am siphoning off and so do all the others." he told Harry with a grin.

"I don't have the money Harry. But I will do all the legwork for you." Lupin told him. McGonagall, Snape and Hermione were the only ones who did not say a word.

Harry was so touched. He took a few seconds to blink his eyes furiously and then smiled at them. "I am not going to accept any money from any of you right away."

All of them started shouting and Harry clapped his hands desperately.

“Will you think me a show off if I tell you a few statistics?”

“Nooooo.” All of them chorused.

Harry swallowed. “Dumbledore wanted to get my money to rebuild the Wizarding World. Sirius also left me his wealth. The House of the Potters is worth about fifteen billion galleons and the House of Black about thirteen. Please in memory of my parents and Sirius; let this be my contribution to our world. Please. I am not trying to show off or insulting any of you; please don’t take it like that, please,”

Harry was cut off by Arthur who came up to him and hugged him gently.

“No we are not Harry. Yes you may spend as much as you like and we will help you in any manner you like, be it with money or with our work or with our thoughts. You need not apologize for wanting to spend the money for the good of us all.”

All of them more or less agreed and a very relieved Harry decided the first place of visit would be Luna’s place and from there to Gringotts to ask them about the legalities and then to Grimmauld Place to meet the Order and Dumbledore.

“Harry I think we should split up. Hermione, Minerva, Bill and I will meet Lovegood. You, Severus and Remus, if James is willing to spare him meet with the goblins and in fact ask them to draw up the contracts as well. They would plug any loopholes from your side and leave as many for you to enter from the Ministry’s side.” Arthur told him and they agreed.

The Slytherins were to relax at Godric's Hollow until they were called. Neville would go back to avoid awkward questions from his Gran. James and Sirius wanted Remus to be with them and they were already talking with a privacy spell around them. Lily had rolled her eyes and moved to another portrait and was busy chatting with Arran, Ria and the others.

Snape would be with Harry and if Snape was called then Harry would manage on his own and come back using the portkey.

On that note all of them who had jobs to do left.

End of Chapter – 26

Chapter – 27

Hermione, Minerva, Bill and Arthur Weasley apparated to Ottery S. Catchpole and walked the short distance to Luna's house that was a little away from the village in the opposite direction to the Weasley home that was also tucked away from the main muggle village.

They walked down the narrow path that led into the woods and Arthur Weasley went forward as he knew where the Lovegood home was, having visited it a few times before.

They found the house in a small clearing and Bill was amazed that there seemed to be no wards anywhere around the house. He wondered at the brashness or was it the foolishness that made Mr. Lovegood so uncaring of his safety and of the security of his home.

Arthur in the meantime had gone up to the door and was now knocking sharply. A moment later the door was opened by man who looked totally frazzled and harried.

He was of medium height and very thin. He had a bright look on his face though and he was slightly balding at the temples. He was wearing dark green robes with some very strange prints on it.

"Arthur come in, come in," he rushed to sat and with a huge smile invited Arthur and the other three. He bowed low to McGonagall who looked bemused at the sight of so much friendliness.

He asked them to come into a home that was more cramped than The Burrow was. The living room was full; full of things that made no sense to anyone. The walls were covered with posters of all types photographs that McGonagall honestly did not know from where this man had bought because each photograph was a picture of strange looking beasts with the names of 'the Crumple Horned Snorknacks', 'Nargles', "Grumplings", Ten Tailed Kerucheeks" and "Gnorrors", whatever they were.

McGonagall, Hermione, Bill and Arthur looked at Lovegood dubiously. Arthur was friendly with Gerald Lovegood but even he was doubtful

whether this man could be of help to their cause. Arthur knew he was forever looking for non-existent creatures; that were fine with him, but the chaos that was present in the house made him think about Gerald Lovegood's contribution to their cause.

The articles in the press were the pivot around which they would have to gather their strength Arthur knew. But would the man even take him seriously to print such vitriolic articles about Voldemort, let alone agree to work amidst danger that would come the moment the first article was printed was the area of concern.

"Arthur what can I do for you?" Lovegood asked him with a beaming smile on his face as he used his wand to clear four chairs for them to sit upon.

"I am here on behalf of Harry Potter. You remember he gave an interview for Rita Skeeter two years ago?" Arthur asked him with a smile. All of them sat down gingerly on the chairs and tried to look comfortable.

Mr. Lovegood nodded his head. "Yes of course Arthur. I was forced to put the amazing details of the Crumple Horned Snorknacks on the third page. But Luna you know my daughter was quite insistent about the Harry Potter interview and I decided to humor my only child."

Arthur blinked and smiled uncertainly as he tried to say something knowledgeable about Crumple Horned Snorknacks but his mind simply could not connect with anything remotely like the Crumpled something Snorknacks.

So he cleared his throat, smiled at Lovegood and once again cleared his throat and looked at the others for assistance. They were useless as they stared back blankly at them. He smiled weakly at Lovegood who was looking expectantly at him and racked his brains to say something intelligent and slowly work his way to a request.

"Hello! Why has Harry not come here? Is he afraid of the Wackspurts?" a new calm and serene voice broke through the embarrassing silence.

Hermione whirled around to see Luna enter the room. Her hair was windblown and she looked as she always did pale, and her protruding eyes looking at everyone with a dreamy expression.

“Er no; he was not afraid, he had some other work to do. How are you Luna?” Hermione asked her with a smile.

“I am okay. I was just searching for the Greering Gills in the river behind the house. They are very tiny and so very easy to miss. How is Harry?” she asked Hermione in return. Hermione blinked for a second and then remembering the purpose for which they had come smiled at her with great effort.

“Fine.” Hermione replied.

“Harry wants to use the Quibbler as he did in our fifth year, doesn't he?” she asked Hermione, shocking her, who gasped and looked incredulously at Luna.

Luna looked calmly at Hermione and then turned to look at her father for a long moment. Her father too, looked deeply into her eyes and then he nodded once.

Luna turned to Hermione and smiled. “Tell Harry that Daddy will give him the first six pages for his news for as long as he wants. On the other pages Daddy will write about the rare magical creatures. There is only one condition though.”

The others were stunned at Luna's words and it was only Hermione who slightly understood that there was more to Luna beyond the dreamy look. “What is it Luna?” she asked the other girl gently, wishing Harry was here. He would have known how to handle this Ravenclaw who was smiling at her dreamily.

“Tell him I too wish to fight with him in his war. Will you?”

All of them gasped in shock. “Er I will.” Hermione managed.

“When may I meet him?” Luna asked her.

In response Hermione gave a parchment and bound that with Luna. "Harry will write you in that and he will tell you where he will meet you, alright?"

Luna nodded her head and then sat down in another chair and looked dreamily into space humming something under her breath. McGonagall seemed shocked by Luna and so were the Weasleys present there.

"Okay that is settled Arthur. I presume all of you came for that?" all the others nodded their heads and Mr. Lovegood went on beaming at all of them.

"Little girl," he addressed Hermione who seemed shocked at being called a 'little girl', "How will you get the articles to me?"

"Sir if we may floo to your place, then we will hand over the articles to you. How often will you be able to print?" Hermione asked him.

"I print every fortnight. But with the serious messages that we must get across I think we must print good articles about the war and You-Know-Who twice a week at least." He finished shocking all of them by his sensible words and his knowledge.

"That would be fantastic." Arthur told him and he was about think of a good way to talk about the money that Mr. Lovegood would need to print when Luna intervened once again.

"Daddy can print twice a week for at least five months without a problem. I think by then the sales will be so much we would not need to ask Harry for any money. If the Quibbler does not sell then Harry may support us until the war is over, because then we will have to give away free copies to make the people understand about our theories. That way they also get a bonus and will be able to read all the great stuff about the Snorknacks and the Nargles which make for a great reading really."

"Er, yes." Hermione really did not know what to say. The others were astounded at the mixture this family was. Sharp to the point of being intuitive and then vague to the point of exasperation.

After taking the floo address Bill and McGonagall volunteered to ward the place for them.

“Oh there is no need Madam. There are invisible wards of intent all around these woods. No one with intent to harm or even ridicule may enter. We will be very safe.” Mr. Lovegood beamed at McGonagall who smiled back a bit uncertainly at him.

Then they spent a little time talking about the type of articles and Mr. Lovegood was keen to have them published. They decided to kick start from the very next day as that was Harry’s birthday.

McGonagall promised to get at least three articles by ten ‘o clock at night. Mr. Lovegood had demanded the articles by ten so that the printing would take place smoothly.

Thanking the Lovegoods Hermione, McGonagall and the Weasleys left the untidy house bewildered and unable to understand both the father and the daughter.

“He will print for us won’t he?” McGonagall asked Arthur doubtfully as walked to the apparition point.

It was Hermione who answered. “She will see to it professor. She will make sure the printing goes on smoothly.”

McGonagall looked highly doubtful about anything going on smoothly in that house but she held her tongue and apparated to Godric's Hollow and seeing the Slytherins still there she told them about the Lovegoods agreeing to help them out and the need for good articles by ten that night.

Draco, Pansy and Hermione were in charge of writing one and a maximum of two articles and James, Lily, Sirius and Remus were writing one and Arran, Blaise and Ria were writing another.

McGonagall left to Grimmauld Place along with Arthur to inform Dumbledore their search for Harry Potter had been futile.

Harry and Snape apparated to Diagon Alley and went inside. Harry and Snape had both worn a long hooded cloak. They also cast notice me not charms and walked briskly to Gringotts.

They saw Tonks whose hair was a mousey brown looking at the streets forlornly. She did not notice Harry and Snape walking into Gringotts, though Moody who was a little distance away noticed them with his magical eye.

He ran to them but by then, they had gone inside the building and knowing he could not use force on them in Gringotts, he sent a Patronus to Albus saying Harry was with Snape of all people and they were in Gringotts and would Albus come at once.

Albus apparated at once to Diagon Alley and went to Moody and spoke to him.

“Are you sure? Is Severus really with Harry?” he asked Moody incredulously.

“Yes Albus. They had a notice me not charm on them and I saw Harry and Snape quite clearly. But do not go inside and create a fuss. You know the goblins can make it tough for us. Stay here and we can catch them surely.”

Albus agreed and they stood there sending Tonks away to Grimmauld Place.

They waited until nightfall and then Albus went inside and enquired if there was a Harry Potter or a Severus Snape inside as he had matters of great importance to discuss with them. He was told politely that Mr. Potter and Mr. Snape had been there but had left a long while ago.

Tired and astounded that he and Moody had missed Harry and Snape, Dumbledore apparated to Grimmauld Place along with Moody calling for the full meeting of the Inner Council members.

Harry and Snape entered Gringotts and walked swiftly to room at the back and knocked sharply on the door. The door opened and they were met by Pitot and Harry smiled and shook hands with the goblin that had helped him so much last year and had also promised to help them against Voldemort.

“How are you Sir?” Harry asked it with a smile.

The goblin grinned back. “I am fine Mr. Potter. And you are as polite as ever. Tell me what can I do for you?”

Harry looked for a moment at Snape, who nodded encouragingly at him and then Harry turned to the goblin and started speaking of all he wanted to do. The goblin listened quietly as Harry started talking softly but became increasingly passionate about his dreams and his plans for starting a School, university, orphanage and helping the half breeds.

“We can do so much you see Sir. We can make sure that all magical beings are given the right to live by first helping them and allowing them to live in dignity. The final aim is to get at least two seats on the Wizengamot for all half breeds making it so that any one with magic has a right to live in equality in the magical world.

“Each of the species may have their own Council, like your own Goblin Council, but all of us will meet together in the Wizengamot to address issues that affect all of us, instead of just the wizards and witches taking unilateral decisions for beings they don’t understand or care for.

“If each race and species has their representatives, then any law passed will have to consider the effect the said law on all of us instead of like it is now. Today we care only for the so called completely human, but we neglect to take care of the vampires, werewolves, veelas, high elves, house elves, goblins, centaurs, merpeople and everyone. Even ghosts in my opinion. All of us need each other to live and when that is the case why should we talk of superiority or inferiority?

“This beautiful world is for all of us to coexist not for one race to walk all over the others.”

Harry sat back praying he had not offended the goblin and looked nervously at him and then looked at Snape who was looking at him affectionately and extremely proudly. Harry grinned back nervously at Snape and looked at the impassive goblin that was still silent.

A long minute later it cleared its throat and looked deeply at Harry who was by then reduced to a mass of nerves.

"I am impressed Mr. Potter. Truly impressed. If you are able to succeed by even a little in this you will be the greatest wizard after Merlin, who also saw all the races as interdependent on each other and declared them as equal."

"Thank you Sir." Harry told the goblin, a feeling of relief sweeping through him. He could feel Snape stiffening in pride at the comparison to Merlin.

"Now," the goblin said briskly, "For you to need the School, you need to get the relevant papers from the Ministry. It is very easy because the Ministry will give immediate sanction, especially for a Day School that runs on its own funds.

"I will have the paper work in about five minutes for the School and the orphanage. The counseling center is just another business and since it is completely legal, I have the license prepared before you leave. The university will be the real challenge as it is a completely new concept. Another thing you need from the Ministry will be the duplicate of the Book of wizards."

"Sir please wait." Harry told him. The goblin paused.

"What about education to other species Sir?"

The goblin smiled, "Mr. Potter I would advise you to start with the human and the werewolves alone in the beginning for your School. Let it gain popularity and let the other races see for themselves about your integrity. Then you may fund separate schools for, vampires and elves and goblins. Now they will not come as they do not trust humans and your humans would not come because there are vampires and goblins around. It would defeat the purpose Mr. Potter."

“Harry Mr. Pitot is correct. We must first accept them in our minds before we can completely integrate with them. The same goes for them as well. Let us start small and slowly build up separate schools for each race and have them join together at the university level. What do you say?”

Harry nodded smiling brightly and the goblin grinned. “Who put you on to this, Mr. Potter?”

“All of them who are with me Sir.” Snape turned to look incredulously at Harry, a look the goblin did not fail to notice.

“We used to discuss the war all the time and inevitably the aftermath would creep into our discussions. That was where I got the idea that if we started this work now then it would help us later.” Harry explained.

The goblin nodded and flicked its fingers. Another goblin came in and Pitot whispered something and sent him away.

“The forms will be here in a minute Mr. Potter. I will try and get you the approvals for everything today. Where will you have School and the orphanage?”

“Sir how about my properties? Is there any one I could use, one with a lot of grounds and stuff?”

“Harry, we could use the one in Scotland that is quite near Hogwarts for the university. For the School cum orphanage we could use the other property in Scotland. We could also buy a better version of the Knight’s bus and take the students along everyday and drop them back. What do you say?”

“Fantastic!” Harry grinned and Snape ruffled his hair with love and smiled back at the enthusiastic boy who was so thrilled.

“We will arrange for all that. The properties will be adequate I think. Once the sanction for the School is given, then we may request for the copy of the Book of Wizards. The moment you receive that, Mr. Potter you will know how many children are magical, including the werewolves because they are wizards who have been turned. The other races are not given in it, though.”

They had to wait for a while for the approvals to be taken to the Ministry department and in that time Harry and Snape went down to the vaults. Harry keyed in Snape and both of them wandered inside. Snape was amazed at the wealth he was seeing and he went into raptures over the books and different types of magical objects telling Harry everything about those he knew and examining the ones he had not seen before.

“How is it so ridiculously easy it is to start something of this type Sev? I had thought it would involve a lot of red tape and meetings with Fudge and other obnoxious asses in the Ministry and then talking my hind leg to convince them and so much more actually.”

“All of that is there Harry but you have a special status as the ‘Chosen One’ and a lot of money and you are the Head of two important Houses. That simplifies things and then the goblins trust you fully. So they are also going out of their way to cut through all the difficulties that may creep in your way.”

“Great! Sev, I thought we would hire or purchase outright a big spacious place here in Diagon Alley and start the counseling center here. If we can keep it close to Knockturn Alley and keep it open twenty four hours, I am sure the counseling center for the half breeds would be a success.”

Snape nodded. “Harry you must take their signatures on magical contracts before giving them the money to invest and in those contracts you must make them affix their signature to many things. Like for instance, they must submit accounts until such time they are able to repay the loan and they should also not do any illegal business that may get us into trouble.”

“You are right as usual Severus Tobias Snape.” Harry declared with a grin as Snape rolled his eyes at the dramatics.

“Harry you are also not to forget the seats the Houses of Potter and Black that you have on the Wizengamot. Once we get this thing with Albus settled, then I think we may start using it to push a few resolutions through. Draco, Nott, Blaise, Pansy have seats in the Wizengamot. On this side Amelia Bones and Longbottom have seats

that you can have if you can talk to Madam Bones and Mrs. Longbottom. It will not be difficult.”

They spent some more time chatting and then Harry and Snape went up to find the goblins all ready with the papers and a huge tome that was placed on one side.

“Mr. Potter, please sign at the appropriate places and also fill up the names of the counseling center, School, orphanage and university. The Ministry has said it will watch up to a time of three years and if you do not conduct business in an appropriate manner, then it withholds the right to close them all.”

“Thank you Sir. How did they agree with the School for kids who will be so young?”

“We told them in the times of war all the magical children will be safe in a warded place and the future of the wizarding population will not be left to the mercies of the attacks that are taking place on a daily basis. After that they were willing to sign anywhere.”

Harry grinned at the cunning of the goblins and started signing at all the marked places and Snape asked the goblin about premises at Diagon Alley and soon he was looking at the empty shops on a map of Diagon Alley.

Harry looked at Snape, “Sev,” he called.

Snape came over. “What is it Harry?”

“They have asked for the names Sev. I thought I will name the university after Sirius and Regulus and call it ‘The Black School of Higher Studies’. What do you think?”

Snape’s eyes shone at the mention of Regulus. He simply nodded his head suddenly his throat constricting him.

Harry smiled sadly. “The name for the orphanage next. I would call it ‘Sacrifices’ for that is what my parents and so many others did so that all of us may live and the School, ‘The Rose Cottage’ because I learnt so much there. I came in despair to that place and I found my

greatest strength there that gave me hope for the first time that I could do it too and," Harry shyly shrugged.

Snape was dumbfounded. He had thought Harry would name the School after his parents. But to name it after his cottage, he knew it was Harry's way of saying that he was naming it after him and calling him his greatest strength well! Snape couldn't speak or move if his life depended on it and he stood there staring at Harry.

A long moment later Snape managed a 'Thank you'. He could not speak after that and Harry understood. He also did not say a word more but smiled widely and wrote the name down.

They picked up three shops for the counseling center. Two of them were together and Harry approved of that right away and Snape advised him to take the third shop that was one shop away from the other two.

"You can keep the other two as actual counseling rooms, maybe we can have more than two rooms there?" he raised his eyebrows to the goblin who nodded.

"Very easily Mr. Snape. There is a lot of space inside."

Snape smiled his thanks and looked at Harry. "The shop that is away will do well as a reception center and we can keep that aloof from the other two."

"That's brilliant Sev. That is what we will do then." Harry said and he looked at the goblin and grinned.

"Thank you Sir. I will never forget this. You have been very kind." Harry told the goblin formally as they finished with all the formalities and Harry was free to start with the actual work.

The goblin gave the huge book to Harry who was surprised to find it feather light. Harry smiled and looked up, "Mr. Potter it has been a pleasure and I do not remember saying these words to any other. May you succeed in all your endeavors and be very happy. You too Mr. Snape." The goblin smiled at both of them and shook their hand.

Harry and Snape left Gringotts by using the Potter ring as the portkey and landed in Godric's Hollow. They told everyone all that they had done and in turn learnt about Luna and McGonagall's doubts that she expressed with shaking her head almost continuously. Harry grinned; he was feeling very happy.

Harry spent the next hour suggesting points and talking to his parents and Sirius about all that he had done. Remus looked a lot better and he grinned at Harry when he came up to chat.

"Harry," Lupin started hesitantly. "I have already forgotten Moony. Please don't say anything more." Harry told him with a smile.

"Are you sure Harry? I am so very sorry, but I just could not help it."

Sirius and James rolled their eyes. "Of course Moony. Don't be silly." James grinned at him. The three of them, not listening to Lily and were writing all the stupid things that a death eater could do and had decided to sign it with their names as well. Remus was writing it down as they dictated to him, sometimes rolling on the floor with laughter and then Lily would glare at them and ask Remus to read it and then strike it out nine times out of ten.

Harry looking at his father and Sirius with deep affection was very happy. He had accomplished a lot in one day and he was going to a bit more. Arthur Weasley was at Grimmauld Place and he had had his earring activated. Bill and the Twins were there sitting very aloof and Harry had activated his earring once he and Snape had come to Godric's Hollow and he could hear Molly's angry voice asking Bill and the Twins why they were so rude.

There were no answers of course from any of them and Arthur did not say a word and Harry could almost hear the hurt in Molly's voice.

Harry had converted the study into a meeting room of sorts as there was a long table with many chairs there. He already asked Dobby and Winky to come over and make some dinner for all of them. Harry had not had anything since last night; while he had no hunger all through the day because of so much of tension about the various issues he had wanted to address, he had been very hungry when they had returned from Gringotts.

All of them had dinner there before Arran, Hermione and Remus gave three articles for the Quibbler.

Arran had written about the back story of Voldemort and Draco and Hermione a research article about blood purity detailing out all about wizarding marriages and what would entail purity for the succeeding generation if any. Harry's message as the 'Chosen One' to the people was not yet complete since Harry had been away and he would write it only now.

The Complete Story of Tom Marvolo Riddle – I Am Lord Voldemort (the name I am Lord Voldemort is an anagram of the name Tom Marvolo Riddle)

Voldemort was born Tom Marvolo Riddle in a muggle orphanage sixty eight years ago. His mother was Merope Gaunt Riddle who married Tom Riddle a muggle who live in the house on the hill near to the broken down hut of the Gaunts.

The Gaunts were descended from Salazar Slytherin but had a strong strain of insanity on account of marrying their own cousins and sometimes siblings in order to maintain what they believed, blood purity.

But unfortunately they did not know that blood purity means magical purity or the strength of your magic that runs in your blood and not marrying into the so called pure families as it is understood today.

If we are to take blood purity as the basis of following Voldemort, then we would have to kill him first because he is a half blood born of a muggle father and a witch mother.

Continuing with our story Merope Gaunt fell in love with a handsome boy Thomas Riddle who lived in the Manor House in the village of Little Hangleton and who was almost engaged to be married to another girl who was also a muggle.

It was at that time that Marvolo Gaunt, his son and Merope's brother Mad Morfin Gaunt were found guilty of harassing

muggles and were sentenced to Azkaban for some time; Marvolo for six months and Morfin for three years.

In that time Merope cast a compulsion charm on Thomas Riddle and fed him with a love potion.

They eloped and an insane Marvolo Gaunt came back to find his daughter run with a muggle of all people and his son in Azkaban for three years. He died a heartbroken man a few months later.

Merope Gaunt's love potion was somehow overcome by her husband or may be she removed the effects herself by an antidote thinking she had the love of her husband, we do not know, but a few months later a ragged and a horrified Tom Riddle Sr. came back and started living with his parents. He never married anyone else though.

Merope was heart broken and she lived the last few months of her pregnancy and life in utter squalor. She died at childbirth in an orphanage where she named the baby boy she had as Tom after the man she had loved and lost and Marvolo after her father.

To be continued...

Compiled from the Diaries of Regulus Black who was a death eater initially, but later on turned a traitor to Voldemort because he did not agree with the policy of whom he calls a madman and an insane maniac—Harry James Potter

"Fantastic Arran." Harry told him after he read the first chapter of the story of his nemesis. "But why should I take the credit for this?" he demanded.

"Because if I affix my name proudly at the bottom I will be tortured and killed?" Arran told him with a smile that turned to a grin as Harry blushed in realization.

"Thank you my Lord Arran for giving me the credit for such a noble piece of work." Harry bowed dramatically making Arran, James and Sirius laugh. They too had been hearing Harry read aloud what Arran had written and they were impressed.

"This way Voldemort will grit his teeth and snarl but he cannot do anything more. He will simply think that this is one more reason to kill the Golden Boy." Harry rolled his eyes at the Golden Boy and grinned.

Then he too sat down with a quill and parchment and started writing the message from the 'Chosen One'.

A Small Message...from... Harry James Potter

Voldemort is terrifying the Wizarding World, killing indiscriminately and holding the wonderful world of magic to ransom. And all for what? To take revenge against the muggle father who left his mother because he woke up one day from a love potion. WHAT A JOKE! All this killing of innocents and ruining the Wizarding World by his hate is because of one insane man's petty revenge.

Riddle, that is his name not Voldemort, hates the pure bloods because he is not one. He hates the half bloods because he is one and he feels in his mind that he is inferior to the pure bloods of whom he is jealous. He hates the muggleborns because he feels they are inferior to him and he hates the muggles because his father who was a muggle abandoned him.

What a bloody stupid man! He seems to run his life on hate and he has accomplished a lot. What has he accomplished?

Well for one the most important thing he has accomplished is the destruction of the pure bloods because he feels there should be no one superior to him. Today half a century after he has come on to the scene as a major player a Dark Lord he had effectively killed off almost all the prominent pure blood families.

Among those left the Lestranges come first to mind as surely they would either be killed by Voldemort as a punishment. Rabastan Lestrangle has already died and the others too will be killed either by Voldemort or by the aurors for the atrocities they have committed in the name of their Lord. The Malfoys, I dare Lucius Malfoy, Rookwood and McNair and Avery to fold their sleeves of the left arm and walk proudly. They too will die either at the hands of the Dark Lord or at the hands of the aurors.

The Ministry of Magic is so ineffective that they have not even had periodic and random checks on their employees who are privy to much information and that if such information falls into wrong hands would do much damage. The Ministry of Magic is not concerned by all this it seems.

So many pure blood families have died for what I do not know but they have died because of Voldemort. There is something very wrong here.

While I do not agree with the policies, if I may call them that in the first place, of old Voldie thingy or whatever that creature is (really) I also do not agree with the most STUPID policy of our esteemed Headmaster (the esteemed is highly debatable in my opinion) that we need not have a rule of barring all the muggleborns to speak about our world.

The muggles are six billion around the world and more than fifty million of them live in the U.K. so Voldemort cannot in this life time or the next kill all of them.

With so many muggles and hardly a hundred thousand of us who are reducing every day because of the mad killing, to expose our world to the fifty million muggles can hardly be classified as brilliant.

What if any muggleborn decided to expose our world? It would take only one muggleborn and our world will be lost forever.

My best friend is a muggleborn. Her name is Hermione Granger and she agrees wholeheartedly with me in this saying that all families of muggleborn students must be spelled to ensure they never speak of our world to anyone and I agree with her as well.

I have come of age today and I will be taking my seats on the Wizengamot as Head of the Potter and the Black families and will pursue this ardently and try my very best to have it passed as law.

The Wizarding World has been held to ransom by Voldemort who is slowly but surely killing our world and not the muggles

as he would have us believe, Dumbledore who is taking law into his own hands all for the greater good of course. What? Who's greater good? Well Dumbledore's naturally, for it is definitely not ours or mine and the great Ministry of Magic which has no balls and is made up of the most pathetic, ineffective set of persons who do not do a grain of good to us.

I, Harry James Potter have lost too much because of the above three. I lost my parents to Voldemort, my childhood to Dumbledore and am in danger of losing my precious world because of the inept Ministry of Magic.

I have sworn today that I will not lose more. I have now become an adult and have decided to wage a war, a war where I do not wish to kill or control, but fight a war for my freedom and the freedom of my world – our world from these terrible manipulators. Come, join hands with me my fellow wizards and let us strive to make this world a better place.

To Be Continued....

Harry read this aloud a bit nervously and then looked around for a reaction. Arran looked very impressed. "You have gone straight for the kill, fantastic."

Snape nodded, "It will be for the good Arran. Harry is going to take on a new role from tomorrow and it will be for the best if he makes his position clear. By denouncing the Dark Lord and Dumbledore he had opened an area that is neither the white as self portrayed by Albus and nor the black as the Dark Lord is painted by everyone. Harry will be the comfortable grey that anyone can approach without fear."

Sirius and James nodded too. Lily though looked worried.

"Harry you are attacking left and right dear. You will be asking for powerful enemies who will come out in the open."

"That will be better Lily rather than have a Dumbledore who happens to care for Harry so much that he wants to break him." James snorted.

Sirius nodded too and grinning he asked Remus to read their paper as well.

Hermione and Draco had written a research paper about blood purity, and while it was dry and slightly boring it contained important information for the pure bloods. They had made it very analytical and almost impossible to contradict.

Then Remus cleared his throat and read their paper.

Open Letter No1 to good old Voldie Baby..... Oooh!!!

“Now when all of you read the headline good old Voldie baby, you are probably thinking about a nice chubby little baby with fat buttocks, chubby cheeks and dimpled chin and lovely blue or in our case, lovely green eyes (because green is the color of our child’s eyes; YES! Our baby is none other than Harry Potter and I am James Potter who is dictating this along with Sirius Black to our good friend Remus Lupin from my portrait) but good old Voldie means ooohhhh! OHNO!! Voldemort!?????????”

He unfortunately was a very ugly baby. NO! I did not see him as a baby sixty eight years ago but my son Harrykins saw him as truly ugly baby at the graveyard when he was resurrected to his ugly body.

Before he resurrected he was a half blood and a mad man. After he resurrected he was still mad and lost his humanness and became a CREATURE!!!! HOW? READ ON!!!!

At the graveyard Voldemort performed a ritual to bring his body back. So he asked his good slave Peter Pettigrew, YES the very same Peter to whom the STUPID Ministry gave an Order of Merlin 1st Class for betraying us to Voldie baby. And because my wife who is also here in the portrait will not let me write it down I will give a hint.

It is a four letter word starting with the letter ‘F’ and I also show the middle finger to both Peter who betrayed us and the Ministry who is brainless and to Dumbles who should be sacked as the Headmaster of Hogwarts and the Leader of the Light for not

making proper enquiries and allowing the imprisonment of my brother Sirius Black unfairly for thirteen years. I demand compensation from the Ministry and Dumbles.

Now as I was saying before I got sidetracked was that Voldie after a ritual at the graveyard dug out the bones of his dad, demanded the flesh of a traitor called Peter, whom Voldie forced to cut off his hand and the blood of my son whom he abducted and bound to a tombstone. Voldie made Peter slit Harry's arm to remove blood and then he churned it all up in a cauldron and jumped into it and became VOLDIEEE. HOW??? Well we do not know the incantations, I am afraid.

The open letter begins here after the introductions -- Now since Voldie baby has the blood of my son, the flesh of Peter and the bones of his dead muggle father, VOLDIE!!! You have become a muggle by some more percent as the bones in you are muggle, you have become a half blood by some more percent because Petey the ratty was a half blood and by taking the blood of Harry who is a half blood, you have become more muggleborn rather than pure blood or even half blood.

Another thing about this taking of bones, flesh and blood sharing is VOLDIE!!!!!!!!!!!!!! YOU OWE A LIFE DEBT TO YOUR FATHER, PETER AND HARRY. Do you understand? Peter is dead so the debt is null and void; you killed your dad, so you are a jackass, but you MUGGLE CREATURE!!! YOU OWE MY SON A LIFE DEBT. Harry will demand it the moment he meets you. YES!!!!!!!!!! Harry will ask for your life and you must fulfill the debt or Merlin! My heart breaks for you Voldie, because if you do not fulfill the debt you will horror of horrors DIE!

Until next time when we will come up with another true but astounding theory about Voldie the Morty it is Goodbye from all of us here.

James Potter, Sirius Black (in a portrait) and Remus Lupin (alive and kicking on the floor)

Harry stopped and looked up incredulously at his father and Sirius who were looking very happy and satisfied with them and turned to

Arran and the others. They were rolling on the floor with laughter. Hermione was astounded and Snape was shocked as he gaped at the portrait.

"This is surely the best Mr. Potter, you have really done us proud." Arran told him in-between his laughter as the other Slytherins nodded. Hermione looked very disapprovingly at them and Snape turned to the portraits.

"See Severus, we have made a joke of him. Really. We are trying to reduce the fear and in that we have given a very serious message to him. Now this I hope will open a Pandora's Box and start discussions about whether Voldemort really owes a life debt to Harry. He cannot kill once he is aware in his mind about it. Now we have created that confusion and doubt not only in his mind but also in the minds of the death eaters." James explained.

Snape nodded thoughtfully trying not to look impressed. "It will do that and if the Dark Lord reads this as he surely will, hell I will take him a copy, and then he will want to stay away from Harry. We can even suggest that since Harry and he have coexisted all this while, the Prophecy can maybe worked around. Yes, this has possibilities."

Suddenly the marks started burning and Snape and the others descented themselves and left

Snape had been disregarding Dumbledore's orders to come to Grimmauld Place all day, but just before he left, Snape sent a Patronus saying he will come with Harry to Grimmauld Place next day at lunch time because now there was great danger.

Harry walked through the floo to the Lovegood residence and handed over the articles for printing and spent some time with Luna and her father. He was about to leave after thanking them, when Luna stopped him, "Harry you have not asked for my oath." She told him dreamily.

Harry flushed, "Luna I trust you." He began, hesitant to ask her an oath when he had not told her anything that would warrant one, but Luna shook her head and knelt down her eyes clear and sharp all of

a sudden, "I Luna Xarina Lovegood swear on my magic I will never betray you."

"Me too, so mote it be." the voice of her father said clearly as held his wand to his chest.

Harry was touched and he knelt down, "I accept and in return promise to protect you and your father to the best of my ability." He said softly making her and her father smile.

Harry said his goodbyes and requested them to send a few free copies to a few Slytherins and others in the Ministry and the Order and told them he would await his copy eagerly the next day and went back to Godric's Hollow to sleep.

Harry went to sleep for the first time in living memory in his own home and on his own bed. He had given a room to Hermione, Remus whom he had simply ordered to move in bag and baggage by asking Dobby to bring all Remus's things from Grimmauld Place and Snape who had the room next to Harry.

Before he crashed for a well deserved slumber, Harry took out his parchment and wrote the Slytherins who had taken the oath in the dungeons for the first time, giving them their first order.

Harry slept peacefully the moment his head touched the pillow.

End of Chapter – 27

Chapter – 28

The next morning Harry woke up at about eight and had a leisurely bath and then wearing clean clothes, the elves had already unpacked everything and had put them away neatly he noticed and went down to say good morning to his parents and Sirius and to have his breakfast.

He found his parents waiting for some one to come and read out the articles in the Quibbler. All the three faces brightened when they saw Harry.

“Happy birthday Harry! Did you sleep well son?” James asked him bringing a delightful smile to Harry’s face. His mother and Sirius shouted birthday greetings to him as well.

Harry nodded and turned to smile his thanks to his mother and Sirius. “Take the Quibbler Harry and be sure to buy The Daily Prophet evening edition. We will know the reactions then.” Sirius told him, gesturing wildly at the rolled up newspaper.

Harry laughed and opened the paper when Snape who had come down along with Hermione and Remus, all wished him a happy birthday and Snape snatched the paper neatly from Harry’s hands.

“Thanks, Hey!” Harry shouted in protest and pouted when Snape merely smirked at him.

“Okay, at least read it Sev.” Harry whined as he held Hermione’s hand and dragged her to him.

“Okay little baby wait.” Snape held the paper and whistled softly impressed. “I will get a call from my Lord very soon. Hear to this.”

**“THE MESSAGE FROM THE CHOSEN ONE – HARRY POTTER ---
Below paragraph 3**

He Who Must Not Be Named Is A SHAM!

New evidence has come in that Voldemort is nothing but a sham, a fraud and a fake. He does not have his own bones, flesh or blood. Then in what way is this creature calling itself the Dark Lord demanding blood purity in the Wizarding World and asking for the lives of all those whom it has the nerve to say is not pure.

This thing that goes by the name of Voldemort is worse than a muggle as it has been resurrected by the contributions of three persons of whom one is dead, one is a traitor and one is a boy who has been saving the worthless hide of the thankless Wizarding World time and again.

The creature owes a blood and a life debt to the boy who has been betrayed by his own and has been treated by a pawn by the Wizarding World, Harry Potter. How will this creature fulfill the debt to this boy? This creature has no magical sense or respect for our traditions because this thing called Voldemort says it will kill the boy who gave it blood even though forcibly taken, to resurrect.

How can this creature take the pure bloods to the pinnacle of glory as it has been claiming when it cannot even recognize a blood and a life debt is what this editor wants to know?"

There was an awed silence as all of them heard the note Snape had read.

Below were the articles Harry had given with a lot of pictures, only the heavens knew from where Luna's dad had got it. The pictures showed gory killings with small captions that said, '*this creature defiling our world*' '*mad, mad and mad again*' '*insane maniac on the rampage*' and many others making all this highly believable.

Harry had smiled a good morning at Hermione and Remus before looking over one shoulder and Hermione reading from the other shoulder of Snape.

Mr. Lovegood had below his incredible introduction printed Harry's article as the message from the Chosen One first, with James's article next, the story of Riddle third, compiled from the Diaries of

Regulus Black and the research article by Hermione Jane Granger fourth.

“Dad your article has come out good. It is as you said and Mr. Lovegood has already started the speculations.” Harry told him with a huge grin. James nodded and grinned back.

“We had so much fun as we wrote it Harry and don’t snort Snape, you might choke a windpipe. That is a pretty poor way to kick off my good man.” James added as he heard Snape snort at him.

Harry gaped at his father, “What, one can die if you snort? I never knew that.”

“You never knew that because that is so silly, stupid and well whatever. Potter! Don’t confuse Harry. He has an important meeting with Albus, have you forgotten?” Snape demanded a little irritated.

Potter and Black were already laughing insanely and he had not even had his cup of tea. This was too bad.

Harry rolled his eyes and Hermione rolled her eyes and sniffed very disapprovingly at them and then catching Harry’s hand she dragged him into the dining room.

“We have so much to do and those two are giggling this early in the morning. Really!” she huffed to an obedient Harry who did not dare tell her he quite enjoyed it. Snape came striding in and sat down.

“How was yesterday night Sev?” Harry asked him softly.

“Bad.” He replied shortly. Harry’s heart dipped and his happiness dimmed.

Snape looked up from the paper and saw his expression and his face softened.

“You must be prepared for a tougher fight than what I faced last night Harry. Don’t lose heart child.”

“How many more must die before I am able to kill him Snape? What if he creates so much damage that the winning does not matter anymore?” Harry asked him scared.

“That will never be Harry. This stuff in the paper today is one of the strongest attacks against the Dark Lord at any given time. How many are the death eaters Harry? Not very many and we already have the more important and powerful ones with us. Then why has he not been defeated by now you may ask. The answer is no one has come forward until now to do what you have. Fight.

“Everyone until now has been defending themselves when the fight came to them, but how many have gone out of their way to fight? No one Harry. That was why we lost and he gained power. Not anymore. You will see for your self believe me.” Snape told him firmly assuaging Harry’s fears a little.

Harry and Hermione’ chatted throughout the meal and Remus joined them halfway smiling about something. He had become younger by more than ten years in the one day he had spent with James and Sirius. Remus and Snape discussed the paper while Harry and Hermione discussed the other Slytherins.

“I hope they will be able to manage Harry, I feel pretty worried. What do you say?”

Harry nodded. “If they can manage fine Hermione, if they cannot, well I am planning to ask them to come to Grimmauld Place, and give them shelter. That is what I promised them after all. They cannot and need not go gallivanting around every night in a try to kill or get killed scenario.”

Hermione nodded her head in agreement and then they moved on to Dumbledore whom they would be meeting at lunch time when Snape’s mark began to burn.

Snape hurriedly de-scented himself and also the Quibbler and then apparated to Voldemort’s hideout pushing the paper into his robes.

At the Malfoy Manor

Draco could not sleep. He would receive the Quibbler and he was trembling with anxiety, anticipation and a good amount of terror. He wondered about the discussion and speculation the Quibbler would unleash tomorrow in the Wizarding World at large and he would know whether Voldemort would fall for the articles, especially the one written by James and Sirius.

Draco had been very impressed. The whole article sounded and looked very silly with its exclamation marks and loudness, but he knew that that would be the news item that would get the maximum attention. James had called for the sacking of Dumbledore as Headmaster and by doing so he had made it clear that Harry would fight both Voldemort and Dumbledore.

That was an impressive statement and while James and Sirius had mocked and made fun, they had three statements that described their stance. One was their take on the ministry, the other on Dumbledore and the last was the truly brilliant one that would cause all the confusion as everyone would be wondering about the life debt they insisted Voldemort owed to their son.

Harry had, that night written to all the Slytherins for the first time on the parchment. He had written all their names and told them he would be sending free Quibbler copies only to the sixth years and they should read it and immediately run to their fathers with it. Nott should call Lucius Malfoy and shake with fear as he showed him the paper.

Draco had the parchment with him and he had read it for the umpteenth time now. he read it again one last time before he erased it and waited for the Quibbler.

Hello,

I turn seventeen tomorrow and I am so glad all of you are alive. I have from today, a day before I become an adult in the Wizarding World started taking steps to fight this war and try to do my little bit to end it as quickly as possible.

Tomorrow, I have asked for copies of the Quibbler, yes the magazine run fortnightly by Luna's dad, only he has promised me he would print it twice a week and give me as much space as I need to write against Voldemort.

I will not spoil the surprise that you will receive tomorrow, but I will tell you one thing. It will be a total shock and you will agree with me that I have created so much chaos that you would not have believed it possible.

I am at my home and I have the portraits of my parents and Sirius Black who was my Godfather with me. They too, have written an article for the paper and that is the one that will cause most damage. They are brilliant after all.

I have sent complimentary copies of the paper to Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler in the Ministry and have made sure they will receive it earlier than you so that they will be in a position to take action and also to all members of the Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore. They will have the shock of their lives and so will the death eaters who work in the Ministry of Magic.

Please stay alert and remember if any time anything gets a bit too much for you, all you have to do is write on the parchment and apparate to a hidden location the name and the secret of which I will inform you in a few days and I will take care of you until the war is over and allow you to live your life in peace later.

WATCH OUT FOR TOMORROW!!!!!!

Harry

Naturally that note put all the Slytherins on the edge and most of them after they returned tired from the raids were nervously writing each other wondering just what Harry had done.

Draco, Pansy and Blaise also wondered with all of them but as they spoke to each other through their earrings they were shivering more in anticipation than the anxiety of the unknown.

The next morning all of them received the Quibbler and all of them almost fainted in shock. Draco was gaping at the introduction Mr. Lovegood had written and he and Luna went up sky high in his opinion and his respect for them increased to unbelievable levels.

He read the paper and found all the articles printed very nicely and the bold letters here and there making it more interesting for the reader. He had also attached a lot of pictures and Draco trembled a bit and then went down resolutely to the dining room where his parents were having their breakfast.

“Father.” Draco called softly from the door, looking terrified and sweat on his forehead and his feet shuffling and his eyes looking very wide and fear dancing in them.

Lucius was about to snap at Draco but as he took in the terror in his eyes, Lucius Malfoy frowned. Draco was getting to be a very good death eater, someone the Dark Lord would be proud of. He would surely get into the Inner Circle very soon. So this trembling boy was raising all kinds of concern in Lucius mind.

“Come in Draco. What is the matter?” he asked just as softly.

Narcissa was watching all this but had to speak a word yet, though her eyes revealed the high alert he mind was at this moment.

Draco for his part just held out his hand with the Quibbler. Lucius now frowned and took the paper and opened it. At the very top were the words ‘with best compliments – Harry Potter’

And then Lucius stopped breathing. He had read the Headlines. His eyes widened unbelievably. He stood up abruptly and moved a step and then he just crashed into his chair but fell down to the floor as he had moved away slightly from his chair in shock.

He was not aware of crashing on the floor or sitting down on the floor where he had fallen as he continued to read. He read the introduction note from Lovegood, the articles from Harry and gasped when Harry had challenged him to walk with the sleeve of his left hand pushed up. He read about Harry Potter’s take on the Ministry and Dumbledore and cursed.

Then he read the article by James Potter and Sirius Black and he almost fainted. A life debt, Potter would ask for the Lord's life and he would have to fulfill the debt or die? What was happening?

Lucius Malfoy felt his world come crashing down. He could feel it, see it. This was the end of his influence in the Ministry. Rookwood, Avery and McNair would also not be able to walk freely in the Wizarding World from now on. Lucius Malfoy gritted his teeth. All of them were in a space of one day were reduced to being fugitives from the Ministry of Magic.

Then another thought came to him and Lucius Malfoy fainted as his concerned son and wife looked on. Draco was triumphant inside as he fearfully enervated his father.

"Father?" he asked in concern and fear.

"Who will inform our Lord Draco?" Lucius asked him, his voice trembling with so much fear. Draco was trembling too. That was the point. Whoever did would be killed on the spot. Lucius Malfoy slowly got up and went into the living room and asked Draco to call Bellatrix, Rudolphus and Arran at once.

Draco ran to the fire and called his aunt, uncle and cousin.

"Aunt Bella?" Draco shouted into the fire. "Uncle, Arran, Ria." He bellowed and a minute later all of them came running into the room.

"What is it Draco?" Bellatrix asked him in concern. It was way too early for Draco to be here with such urgency and she was worried. Arran and Ria were looking concerned but their eyes gave them away. Their eyes were bright with anticipation.

"Father is asking all of you come over right now. There is a crisis here that is terrible aunt Bella." Draco told her his eyes wide and terrified.

"Draco!" a voice shouted behind Draco. "Are they coming or not?"

"Move over Draco, we are coming in." Bellatrix answered and the moment Draco withdrew his head, all of them stepped in.

A minute after they stepped in the fire glowed green again and a shaking Nott came in with a newspaper in his hand.

Bellatrix stepped into the room to find a visibly tense Narcissa. She had never seen this Narcissa tense ever. Not even on the day Draco had taken the mark. Her sister kept her feelings remarkably to herself. Today she was reading over Lucius's shoulder and visibly wringing her hands.

Lucius was reading the rag that was not even fit to be used as toilet paper called the Quibbler. Why that should upset him so much she could not imagine. Yet upset he was, upset enough to call in the whole family for support.

That was when Nott had come in with the same paper clutched in his hands and Bellatrix was now slightly fearful. Had they printed some other capture of the Inner Circle?

She looked at Lucius who had not even got up to greet her and Rudolphus and a small ball of fear clutched her heart. She turned to Nott and grabbed the paper from him.

She read the headlines and gasped. Rudolphus had now taken the other paper from Lucius's nerveless hands and was reading it. He went pale as did Bellatrix who was now reading the introduction and her eyes read the articles carefully with Arran standing at her shoulder and Ria reading with her uncle.

Ten minutes later Bellatrix collapsed on the floor spluttering with disbelief and horror. Rudolphus slumped next to Lucius and Arran was still reading and he was amazed at the introduction Mr. Lovegood had written. It was brilliant.

"What is this Lucius? How did you get hold of this, this, this thing?" Bellatrix asked him sharply.

"I received it aunt Bellatrix." Draco told her faintly.

"I received a copy too." Nott trembled.

“Who will tell our Lord? We had better take this to him soon, before he learns of this from elsewhere.” Arran told them.

Bellatrix squealed and Lucius changed from pale to ashen.

“He will kill us Arran.” She said.

“Mother he will do worse than kill you if he realizes that Draco had received a copy and uncle had not seen it fit to bring it to his notice. The fact you knew as well, you know our Lord would take it as a betrayal. This way he may get angry but he will not doubt us surely.”

Bellatrix sighed and then shivered with fear.

“You are right as usual Arran. That is what we will do. But we will go together. Come on. How did the blasted boy get the information to write all this? The traitor Regulus.” Bellatrix’s voice turned very hateful.

“And is there any truth in what the articles say?” Lucius asked in a very low voice. “Oh Bellatrix, the damage these articles would do. Potter had declared war, Bellatrix. He had in effect told the world that he does not agree with the Ministry, us and Dumbledore and has dumped us all together and has opened a portal to a new side, a new life. I am very scared. I cannot walk the streets as a free man any more and I have become a fugitive Bellatrix.” Lucius put his head in his hands.

His world had come crashing down in one day. His life had placed him upside down and created so much chaos all by one paragraph in one news article.

“All the spies in the Ministry will be on the run from today or will be captured by the aurors. We have lost our foothold in the Ministry and maybe in the Wizarding World as well.” Rudolphus said and all of them looked at each other in terror as they contemplated what four articles had done to all of them.

“Bloody James Potter. Trouble when he was alive and trouble when dead and his son’s worse. Why cannot he die and leave us in peace I have no idea.” Bellatrix said very bitterly and they prepared to leave.

Lucius was trembling and in fact so were the others. They had already lingered as much as they could and as Arran said they should tell their Lord before he come to know they knew and had delayed telling him.

Nott had been very quiet and had very intently listened to every thing there standing beside Draco. He could also see Draco listening to everything the same way as he was.

He was very glad he had chosen to change sides. Harry had just by three pages in a rag that no one read had put so much fear and the articles by themselves were so frightening and he was very glad Harry had already arranged alternate plans for them in case things got tough.

They were about to apparate when the fire turned green and almost all the sixth years with their parents came in with the Quibbler clutched in their hands, all of them wearing terrified expressions on their faces and looking relieved when they saw not only the Malfoys but the Lestranges there.

Bellatrix took one look at them and realized Potter had sent the Quibbler to all the sixth year Slytherins and she simply fumed but the damage was done. Many of them were looking scared but also there were the doubts in their eyes and Bellatrix cursed to her self. Boot was not there so he had not got the Quibbler she supposed.

He was not in Slytherin and Potter had sent complimentary copies to the Slytherins and they had rushed here not wanting to go alone. Well this would help them as well Bellatrix thought and she clapped her hands, not that anyone was talking, they had seen the Quibbler in her hands and they had not asked a single question.

"We need to go to the Dark Lord and show him this trash and let him punish those who had the foolishness to write all this rubbish about him." She said with determination and watched all of them but no one was convinced and she realized this was a bigger thing than she had thought initially.

The fact this was coming from Potter's mouth made it more believable somehow. Why she did not know as the boy had not even

finished his school, but it had an impact; of that there was no doubt. She cursed to herself again and crisply told everyone to apparate to the Lord's Manor and let him deal with this himself.

Choosing Harry was the best thing he did Nott thought as he apparated with Draco, both of them looking at each other and the other sixth years that were there meaningfully.

All of them apparated to Voldemort's Manor and looking at each other went in.

Voldemort was in the library, the elf that came there at Bellatrix's snap of her fingers, told her.

"Please inform the Master that many of us have come to meet him and we have some news with us." Bellatrix told the elf formally.

The elf popped out and Voldemort came striding out and stopped when he saw so many people and frowned. He saw Bellatrix clutching a newspaper with her and he silently held out his hand.

He noticed the way her hand shook when she came forward to hand it to him and he wondered what it could be.

He took the paper and he saw that all of them move a step backwards, including Bellatrix and Lucius was trembling. Voldemort had a very bad feeling about this and he quickly opened the paper and hissed in anger.

He read the articles very quickly and then paused and read them slowly again and then looked up, his red eyes flashing never a good sign. "Bella!" he shouted.

Bellatrix came running and he grabbed her left forearm and pressed the mark. In about five minutes death eaters started trickling in. All those who had no information simply looked alert. After all until now no one really bothered to buy the Quibbler. This day would change all that.

There was no sign of Rookwood, McNair and Avery who worked in the Ministry as well as three other death eaters who worked in lowly

positions. Snape had already come and for that Voldemort was a bit relieved.

Voldemort waited for a few minutes more and when it looked they would not come he turned to look around at everyone present.

Surprisingly he did not shout or curse. The articles had shaken him far more than one would have thought. He was not bothered about his life story though his status as a half blood was now being brandished about, but Potter's message calling out to all wizards, an open invitation for everyone to fight him and Dumbledore was impressive and a little frightening, though Voldemort hated to admit that even to himself.

The article that would do the most damage was the one written by the dead James Potter. Voldemort fumed. He could already see the doubts in the minds of all of them standing here and he knew apart from his Inner Circle, it would not take much for the rest of the rats to leave if they thought Voldemort was a sinking ship.

He decided when he read slowly the second time; he had to find the truth of this for himself as well. Why did he not listen to the rat and resurrect himself with someone else's blood? That would have caused no complication. Now the whole of the Wizarding World would discuss and debate this and he would have to research this and tell everyone that there was no life debt.

For if there was Voldemort knew he had already lost the war. He would not be able to fight Potter head on and kill him. The next moment he would die because the debt had already been called for. That was what slowed him and stopped him from indiscriminate cursing and yelling.

He had been pacing the room continuously thinking hard. He had to take a few steps back, before he could move forward again. He fumed at that. He read the articles again and then looked at all of them. He wanted to shout and curse and even kill a few of these stupid people here but he restrained himself.

He went to his chair and forced himself to sit down calmly and look unconcerned. He stared at Snape and spoke to him.

"What is happening here and Severus do you have any news? Did Dumbledore say anything? The boy seems to be against him as well. Why?" Voldemort addressed his first question to Snape.

"Master the fool has called an Order meeting today at lunch. He called for one yesterday but I was not there as I was away attacking. Today he will tell me why the bloody Potter boy has been saying all this? Apparently Master the boy has sent complimentary copies to everyone in the Order and also to a few in the Ministry."

"Why has he not named you Severus?" Voldemort asked him softly the question loaded and very deceptive.

"Master the blasted boy believes I am the spy for the stupid Dumbledore. He apparently accused me of being a death eater last year after the blood traitor fell into the veil at the Department of Mysteries. It was the Headmaster who assured him that I am not one. He told me that even though Dumbledore believed me he would not at the time." Snape spoke smoothly and without hesitation and even slightly triumphant.

Voldemort was silent for some time contemplating and then he nodded.

"Well go there today and find out why the boy spoke against Dumbledore and get me the news about where the boy is right now. Go Severus and all of you. Harry Potter has just signed his death warrant by speaking like this. There is no life debt and there is no unjust killing. There is only the war we are fighting against the Wizarding World to secure it only for the pure bloods."

"Master." Lucius Malfoy spoke softly.

"Speak Lucius."

"Master Rookwood and the others have not come. That would mean that they have been captured and imprisoned. Potter has also taken my name. I will not be able to go to the Ministry and do my Lord's work anymore, for if I step into the Ministry, I will be arrested."

“Stay in hiding for the moment Lucius and spread the word you are ill. We will take care of this later. I need to think for a while on all this.”

Snape stepped forward and bowed down.

“Speak Severus.”

“Master if I may say so. Now that Lucius has this problem, I am afraid I too will be checked the moment I step into Hogwarts. But our hopes lie only there. Potter seems to have taken on everyone really. If he is fighting against Dumbledore, then who are his allies? He cannot fight with one werewolf and three portraits and a mudblood. The others are not as they are in the Order and there is no name of Ronald Weasley here.”

Voldemort nodded impressed with Snape’s reasoning. He was so shocked by the articles that held far too much information and he did not know how to deal with it. And now to top it all, he had lost all his spies in the Ministry of Magic as well. He looked at Snape who was speaking again.

“Master I am going to suggest something that you may even kill me for but in the light of what had been written about us I feel this is for the best. May I continue Master?”

“Yes.” The one word came as a whiplash.

“I feel we should continue our attacks on the muggles for now, though we should leave all the magical people alone. When School reopens, that is the moment I leave for School I will be checked and so will all our children.

“If you could change the place of the mark from our left forearm to a place that no one will think of looking and also hide it in such a manner that it will escape detection, we will still get our summons but will be able to walk freely unlike Lucius who will also be tested under veritaserum, none of the children will be. I will say that Master removed the mark because he wanted me to spy for him and say I am of course not loyal to the Dark Lord but to Dumbledore.

“Once in School, all of us will try our best to bring at any cost the boy by this year end. If we fail he will walk away from the School and then it will be impossible to catch him, especially if he is against Dumbledore as well. He would hide by himself and would be impossible to reach. Until then we have time and I am sure we can do this.”

Voldemort thought very hard. What Snape said made a lot of sense. If Snape had wanted to remove the marks then he would have been suspicious but this was brilliant.

Snape bowed low once again. “Speak.” Voldemort ordered him.

“Before we get Potter here my Lord, we should,” Snape stopped and bowed low once again, “We should research on the life debt that the boy’s father is calling for. We should be perfectly clear on that my Lord.” He finished in a low tone.

The others gasped and Voldemort scowled, “Explain Severus.” He hissed in warning.

“Master for us to be on top and also win we will have to answer any questions that may arise. Unfortunately the first questions are tough ones. But it is a good thing because, once we get this out of the way, there is nothing to stop us. We could research this and also the link that our Lord shares with him and we should solve it this summer before us; that is, the other children and I go back to Hogwarts.

“The moment we have the answers, we somehow by hook or crook bring Potter to you because after that there will be no need for any pretense whatsoever. Once with Potter gone and Dumbledore’s image tarnished we will win. We have to, there cannot be another way. We could get the mudblood and even have a spot of torture before we kill her and then the boy.

“Master, we must allow Potter to attack Dumbledore. He is doing a great job and I think we should allow the infighting to take place on a grand scale. Once Dumbledore’s dirty linen has been washed in public, and the people’s faith in the Ministry totally gone, thanks to Potter again, then we move.”

There was a deathly silence when Snape finished. No one spoke for almost ten minutes and Snape was bending down and after what seemed an eternity Voldemort spoke softly.

"You are indeed my man Severus. Your reasoning and analysis is brilliant." He smiled and looked at the others. "What do you all have to say?" he asked.

"I think Master we should do as Snape says but we should stop the attacks and start giving our story to the people and tell them Harry Potter is so very wrong and all we have is the good of the Wizarding World at large. Those who have been killed on our side and theirs are the casualties of war and they should be treated only in that light." Arran spoke up.

Voldemort turned to look at Arran. He smiled and nodded. "It is a good plan Arran. Bellatrix, all of you in the Inner and the Outer circle start preparing the articles right away.

"Come forward Severus and I will change the mark for you right now and also for the others so that they may not get caught. I will change it for every one, including Lucius. Come and we will also think about retaliation."

"We could use The Daily Prophet and give them our version of everything. We can try and prepare articles to that effect and send it with a compulsion charm and make them print it." Arran said and Voldemort who was changing the mark nodded.

"The Inner and Outer Circle please attend to it. I will check those articles tomorrow. You need not stay Severus. I want you to be with Dumbledore and get me as much information as you can."

Arran, Ria, Draco and everyone had their marks moved to high on their thigh. Lucius was the most relieved and Snape looked in wonder at his hand and the others too looked at their unblemished hand in strange fascination.

Nott was thrilled. Snape had done them a world of good, though unknowingly he thought with glee.

Voldemort dismissed all of them except the Inner Circle and sat down with them to talk about this. The rest scuttled away happily. Before they left Voldemort gave them their warning.

“All of you, no more attacks. Live life as normally as you can. Until I call you I want no one to be caught in any activity that will make the Ministry check up on you.”

All of them bowed and went away very relieved and in Nott's and the other Slytherins case very happy and astounded. In one day Potter had done the impossible. He had stopped the attacks and the killing and had removed their marks from their left forearm. Voldemort had also added a Parsel spell to hide it from normal detection spells.

Lucius was most relieved by that. He had not realized how much it would hurt him to stay as a fugitive until this morning and he was the most relieved he would be able to walk about a free man, though he was going to remain in hiding until the furor over the articles died down and they got in their own articles.

Harry had in a space of one day stopped all attacks until future notice. Voldemort had been so shocked and taken aback, he had behaved almost humanly.

The reason for that was he had been astounded by the articles and had been unable to counter it off the top of his hairless head. He had looked around and was able to see their thoughts which were confusing and fearful. That had prompted him to stop, think, evaluate and act instead of simply shouting at all of them to get out and continue what they were doing.

Potter had raised points of value and had the audacity to lump him, the Ministry and Dumbledore together, declaring war on all of them. The most important point was who was aiding him. As Snape rightly said, you cannot fight with one werewolf, one mudblood and three portraits. And the Lovegoods. He must not forget them. They too, were with Potter. But the Weasleys weren't. There was something to be explored there.

Potter had also made a damaging statement about agreeing with him on keeping their world secret. He was baffled about that because he

knew Granger was with him in this and she has apparently supported him in this stance of his. He had to do something to nullify that before all the purebloods would leave him and move over to Potter because he was against Dumbledore as well.

That was why he had given them a break against the killing. He needed time to think up a good strategy that would make him get the upper hand. He turned to go to the library where all his Inner Circle and Outer Circle members except Snape followed him and they started working on the counter articles.

Arran, Ria and the other three apparated straight to Godric's Hollow with Snape and they had a loud laughing, dancing and singing session there. They told the portraits, Harry, Hermione, Remus were there at Godric's Hollow and the others who were at Grimmauld Place who were listening though could not talk back about what had happened at Voldemort's lair and showed off their clean forearms with joy.

All of them were amazed at the restraint Voldemort showed and James hit the nail on the head when he whopped along with Sirius and said, "That is so contrary to Voldemort's natural behavior and nature, it shows he is scared. What the hell Snape! He has changed all your marks. That apart from anything else shows his desperation I think."

Snape nodded. "I wanted him to do that and he has sealed the marks by his magic so that no one would be able to detect it Potter. This will help me with Albus if he gently threatens me with Azkaban and orders me to do his bidding."

"Hell Severus that is brilliant! We never thought of that." Arran exclaimed.

"Yes and that is why we must make sure we never reveal the new place of our marks to anyone else." Snape told them seriously.

That was when Hermione was already working on the next article saw the words appear on Harry's parchment.

“Thank you Potter.” Was all it said and the names of the Slytherins were signed at the bottom. Harry grinned and wrote down saying he would soon contact them for a meeting and there they would decide the next course of action.

On that note Harry and the others sat down to have an early lunch and then Snape, Hermione and Harry left for Grimmauld Place taking a small empty shrunken down pensieve with him.

End of Chapter – 28

Chapter – 29

Albus Dumbledore had had a horrible day. A really bad one. At twelve ten A.M on the thirtieth of July he had been woken up very early by the monitoring spell he had on all his instruments and he realizing it to be those he had on Harry had rushed to his office knowing something was very wrong.

Harry had given all of them no cause to even check up on him even occasionally. He had never left his home and he had not done any accidental magic to cause a crisis.

Now Dumbledore rushed to his office in his pink, orange and purple striped night shirt that would make anyone think in horror about how the man could have gone to sleep in the first place wearing such bright clothes.

Dumbledore ran into his office and found all the instruments that were tied to No. 4, Privet Drive were breaking. That meant the wards were no longer there. Dumbledore transfigured his night shirt into a purple robe and he went to Fawkes and holding him flashed to Surrey. He landed in Little Whinging and there he realized he did not know where Harry lived. He had forgotten that in the time it had taken him to get to Surrey, which was but a few minutes.

It had been erased from his mind. Albus almost fainted with panic and had to steady himself by holding on to a lamppost. He was breathing heavily trying to remember just where Harry lived in Little Whinging. He could not remember and he was terrified for the first time in his life. What had happened to Harry and this was just one day away from Harry to claim his inheritances and become an adult and help him in the war to kill Voldemort.

Suddenly he remembered Arabella Figg and Albus apparated to her home and knocked at her door. She opened a crack and seeing who it was, opened the door fully, and put away the long pipe she had concealed in her other hand held behind her back.

“What is it Albus? Harry has been good yesterday also.” She asked him with worry.

“Where does he live Arabella? Can you show me?” Dumbledore asked her in a hurry.

“Sure.” She said and then paused. “It is just here Albus. But where? Where does Harry live? It was right here wasn’t it?” she frowned at him very visibly confused. Albus and Mrs. Figg roamed the streets of Little Whinging and even passed No. 4 three times but they could not remember a thing.

Very worried Albus apparated to Hogwarts and called for Moody in the dead of the night and told him everything.

“Can you remember where he lives Alastor? You escorted him once from his home two years ago after all.” Albus Dumbledore asked his friend anxiously.

Mad-Eye Moody shook his head scowling and cursing. “No Albus I cannot remember. How did the blasted boy vanish with the house and his relatives?” he asked Dumbledore gruffly but Dumbledore had no answers.

They spent time until morning trying various ways to find the blasted Boy-who-Lived and came with no answers. At six in the morning, a frantic Albus flood The Burrow and saw Molly and Arthur having their tea.

“Did Harry come here Arthur?” he asked looking much disheveled.

“No Albus. Is he not at his aunt’s place in, in” Arthur turned to Molly, “where was it dear?”

Molly crunched up her face in thought and shook her head. “I really do not remember. It was a muggle neighborhood Albus. Oh my! Harry has been taken away and his place has been put under the Fidelus hasn’t it? or has been kept captive there or?” Arthur placed a hand over her mouth and looked at Albus who was watching this with a sinking heart. They too, did not have any idea of where Harry or his home was.

“Where is he Albus? I will try to scout all the places I know before I come over to Grimmauld Place. We were planning to shift there for the holidays and Charlie is also coming there today for a few weeks.” Arthur told him, very worried.

“I have called for a meeting at about eleven. Come there by then Arthur.” And Albus withdrew his head.

Albus withdrew very worried. He washed and dressed and went to Grimmauld Place and paced the floor there. Bill and the Twins were not there and Snape had not answered his call. So he must have been with Voldemort or the death eaters.

Slowly Arthur and then one by one all of them trickled in and Albus immediately told them about Harry’s disappearance.

“The frightening part is it looks like Harry had planned all this. Without his consent or knowledge no one would have been able to conceal not only him but his relatives as well. We must make sure that Harry is not under the *imperious* or some compulsion charm that will take him away from us and into the darkness.”

McGonagall and the others who were there made appropriate sounds of distress and then Albus noticed Remus was not there. Remus was with the Twins and Albus turned to them. Both of them sported injuries and Dumbledore instinctively knew why Remus had not come.

“Is Remus fine?” Albus asked the Twins.

“He was sleeping and we let him be. Should one of us go and bring him?” one of the Twins asked.

Dumbledore shook his head. It was a good thing that he was not there. He would have kicked up a racket and Dumbledore with all the worry and anxiety was just not in the mood comfort Remus.

Albus sent everyone away after it looked all of them were all talking without any purpose here. Tonks had wanted to go to Remus but the Twins had not allowed it, saying Remus wanted to be by himself until he woke up and then he would come straight to Grimmauld Place.

Tonks and Moody apparated to Diagon Alley and it was there Moody saw Harry and Snape and sent for Albus.

Albus was having tea when Moody's message came and he was so stunned, he let the tea cup that was almost full of hot steaming tea fall from his nerveless fingers and onto his lap. It took ten minutes before Albus was able to move. He had conjured cold water on to his thighs and had to wait before he could get up decently and stand straight. He cast a drying spell and apparated at once to Diagon Alley, where he sent off Tonks to Grimmauld Place and learnt from Moody that Harry and Snape had gone inside Gringotts.

He waited and waited the whole day, before he went in and learned from the goblins Harry and Snape had indeed been there but they had left a long time ago.

Snape was not answering to his summons and all his things were intact at Hogwarts. Albus knew he had not gone to Voldemort because of the oath Snape had given so many years ago and at night just when he had decided Snape was a traitor, he received a message from Snape that told him Harry was with him and he would bring Harry to Grimmauld Place at lunch time, the next day. Today was dangerous, the message said rather abruptly.

That message gave Dumbledore another sleepless night wondering what danger Harry was in and why Snape could not get Harry to him safely.

He knew the next day.

At seven in the morning, an ordinary brown owl landed on Dumbledore's office window and pecked the glass softly.

Dumbledore was puzzled. He had no reason to receive letters until---, his heart quickened and he hurried to the window to open it and let the bird inside. The bird had a news paper tied to it and on top of the paper were the words 'compliments of Harry James Potter'

He opened the paper and showed the same reaction as one Lucius Malfoy. CRASH! Albus Dumbledore fell down in more ways than one that day. He saw the introduction note and the message from Harry

and then he flushed with horror and then turned pale and went one step further to graveyard ashen just as Lucius Malfoy did.

James Potter and Sirius Black had come alive in their portraits and were calling for everyone's blood. He read Harry's strong statements and flushed with shame and anger.

He read and re-read all the articles and then the fire turned green and Moody's head came into view. He saw Dumbledore sitting crumpled on the floor and the paper in Dumbledore's hand. Before he could say anything Dumbledore held up his hand, "I am coming to Grimmauld Place. We will meet there and discuss."

Moody took a concerned look at his friend's face and withdrew his head from the fire. Dumbledore landed in Grimmauld Place a minute after that and sent word to all Order members to assemble there. Most of them came within five minutes, all clutching a copy of the Quibbler close to them.

Dumbledore saw that and flushed. He had lost his reputation and respect of a lifetime in just less than ten minutes that it took for all of them to read the articles.

He started getting angry and he was going to give time until lunch for Severus to bring in Harry and the boy had better have a good explanation for why he wrote the things he did.

"I told you Albus all those years ago, you should have killed him." Moody whispered to him. Unfortunately Arthur Weasley heard it and gritted his teeth. They had been asked to stay quiet until Harry arrived and the Weasleys and McGonagall were staying silent.

The other Order members were re-reading the articles and they found the life debt very thought provoking and they also wondered why Harry was so against Dumbledore. Yes he could be a little manipulative but he was straight forward and was the leader of the resistance against Voldemort.

Molly was most distressed. She was astounded and amazed that Harry of all people could write this and Hermione, wasn't she with her parents? When did she join Harry where and write articles on blood

purity? She was already hurt about Arthur and her other sons' behavior with Ron and Ginny. Now Harry was saying such terrible things about the Headmaster. She really did not know what to do.

All the members had assembled and Dumbledore clapped his hands. It was not necessary because the whole room that would usually be so alive was now so silent.

"Harry has been missing since yesterday morning. Yesterday afternoon he was seen in Diagon Alley along with Snape. I was there with Alastor the whole day but he had somehow left without Alastor or I noticing his departure from Gringotts, where he had been with Snape.

"I received a patronus from Snape saying Harry was in danger and he would come here to Grimmauld Place at lunch today. While yesterday I was frightened for Harry, thinking he had been once again in the clutches of Voldemort, today's paper does not make it so. We will wait until lunchtime when Severus will come here with Harry, else we will have to report it to the Ministry of Magic, I am afraid."

"But Albus how did the child go away like Potter did, his aunt's place disappearing so completely and," Alastor said gruffly breaking off there, "Severus is with Harry, I saw them. But why? Harry never cared for him, unless Severus has somehow poisoned his mind and is now Harry's mentor or maybe they are together and," he left it there and there was an outrage just like Moody wanted it.

"Harry has turned only seventeen today, Snape had better not dare!"

"How dare Snape? Lynch him I say"

"Harry is old enough to be his son."

"Once a death eater always a death eater. That is what I always maintain."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

Moody continued.

"I always used to think you were very soft with Snape. That man took the mark willingly. I don't need any more evidence that he should be in Azkaban with the best of them. May be he had poisoned Harry's mind and made him write all this rubbish." He finished with an angry scowl on his face and his wand at the ready.

"How did Harry know about the background of You-Know-Who?" asked Arthur.

"And the article by James? Are their portraits really there Albus? And more importantly does Harry have a life debt and a blood debt he can claim on You-Know-Who?" McGonagall asked him reading the article by James and Sirius aloud.

"Professor Dumbledore, see here Remus is with them. He had left yesterday when we had got back. But who told Harry he was with us and how did Remus know where to go to meet Harry?" the Twins asked.

Dumbledore shook his head signifying he really did not know anything. He was worried about the backlash of all this from Voldemort and from the Wizarding World not to mention the Ministry. Well it was almost lunchtime and he would look out for Harry and Severus and then take it on from there.

All the members were confused and were reading and re-reading the articles and discussing the blood debt and the life debt again and again. Dumbledore was lost in thought and at that time Kingsley Shacklebolt and Tonks came in.

"All the Ministry workers were checked. Harry had sent copies to Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler her deputy. They got in and started checking off Rookwood, McNair and Avery at once by calling for them. They did not check Lucius Malfoy because they could not get into his Manor and he was not working in the Ministry.

"They simply sent messages to the other three and the moment they flood in, Amelia checked their arms and stunned them and then imprisoned them. Another three persons working in the lower levels have also been caught with the mark.

"Then they conducted complete checks all over the Ministry of Magic and the whole place is in an uproar and total chaos. Tonks and I have had to plead sickness and get time off. Fudge is in panic because six death eaters have been found in side the Ministry and one of them with the Unspeakables." Kingsley finished and looked very disturbed at Dumbledore.

"Has Harry come?" he asked the Headmaster who looked equally grim.

"We are also waiting for him Kingsley and I pray he has some kind of explanation for his actions, he, Severus, Remus and Miss. Granger."

Ron and Ginny were also there and they were totally shocked by everything that was unfolding in front of them. Harry had vanished, Hermione was with him and he and Snape was a couple? Yuck. Thought Ron, while Ginny thought it was all very romantic before the thought she had lost Harry and his money came to her mind and suddenly she did not like anything.

They had not received the Quibbler and they had had to borrow Molly's copy and their jaws hit the floor when they read everything and looked fearfully at each other. They had not been included in this and that meant no good for them. After that their silence was very uncomfortable.

As the time got closer and closer to lunch time the Order was getting tenser and tenser. Dumbledore, especially looked grim and forbidding his face set into stern lines.

A few minutes later the already dull and whispered conversation had totally stopped and everyone was looking at the paper and the door alternatively and the tension in there could be cut with a knife, there were soft sounds of apparition that would have not been heard if they were not waiting for it and Dumbledore and the Order turned to see Harry, Snape, Hermione and Remus coming in to the room where all of them were assembled.

The first thing that made all of them stare was the aura Harry exhibited; he was radiating so much assurance, an aura of power and

confidence. Remus, Snape and Hermione were walking a step behind Harry and Harry looked every inch in command.

Suddenly it looked as if Harry had known what he was doing all along and many Order members looked at the boy whom they had not given another thought except that fact he had somehow offed You-Know-Who many years back and he would fight this war the way he was told to. This Harry did not seem like that.

He approached the table and stood near Dumbledore's seat and raised his hand and asked for silence when Moody and Molly had both started asking him something. Arthur stopped Molly and Dumbledore placed a restraining hand on Moody.

"Hello I presume all of you are members of the organization called the Order of the Phoenix? Well I am Harry Potter. I am pleased to meet you, I think." Harry stopped there and looked at all of them and heard the many gasps with a smile that did not quite reach his eyes.

"I am here primarily because professor Dumbledore had seen Severus and me in Gringotts and I know he would naturally assume the worst and maybe even throw Severus to the Ministry by declaring him a death eater.

"I came here to remind him that I am seventeen years of age and that means I am an adult and quite capable of making my own decisions on everything and that includes how I wish to fight this war and I am not answerable to anyone least of all to a man who is only my Headmaster in the School I happen to study.

"I have yesterday become the Head of the Houses of Potter and Black and will start taking my position very seriously. Now while I know I do not have any responsibility to answer any question and please note I have my left sleeve rolled up, so I am not a death eater; I understand you may have questions for me. If they are not of a personal nature or offensive, I will do my best to answer them. But one at a time please."

Harry flicked his wand and conjured four lovely chairs that set themselves gently on the ground and sat in one of them calmly and looked around in mild curiosity.

“Harry you are alright? Can I ask Arthur to check you for the *imperious*?”

Harry laughed. “Yes Mrs. Weasley, though I am not under the *imperius*. I am seventeen years old today and I have already accepted my inheritance and I have the right to apparate and perform magic without threatening letters from the Ministry to break my wand. Please tell me why I should report to a man who is just my Headmaster of the School I happen to study in and that too only for one more year.”

“That is nonsense and you are very ungrateful Potter. The Headmaster has done so much for you and you have simply been scandalous about him in the Quibbler today. He has only looked after your best interests.” Moody ranted and the others watched this amazing power play between Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter.

“What interests Moody?” Harry challenged him disrespect blatant in his voice as he sneered at the ex-auror and everyone gaped at the Boy-who-Lived.

“My Godfather ran away from his home to avoid taking the mark of Voldemort. He left his home, family, wealth and the status of the Head of the House of Black and went as an orphan to the Potters residence. He was not even given a trial and he spent 13 years rotting in Azkaban with the likes of Bellatrix Lestrange.

“This man was the head of the Wizengamot and if he was not even capable of getting a fair trial then what use is he? Second there was so obviously a link between me and the bloody maniac. I suffered all of fifth year because of that. Did I get an explanation and did I know why I was to be learning Occlumency from Snape who so hated me and I so loathed him?

“If only I had known I could be lured to the Department of Mysteries and if only I had known Voldemort had the capacity to place all types of false memories in my head then I would have been more cautious.”

Harry held up his hand as Moody was about to shout something at him.

"I know Sirius would have never come out if I was not there at the Department of Mysteries, and to that extent I take the blame, but where the hell was the leader of the bloody Light when you needed him? I had a vision here and there was Umbridge throwing the *cruciatus* and whom could I go to? McGonagall was injured and no one told me how I should contact a member of the Order in case of an emergency.

"I only had my wits and my desperation to save the only family I had left and thanks to you, all of you, I lost him. While you claimed the confusion and the tension that was prevailing in the Wizarding World as the reason you did not give Sirius a trial all those years ago, two years ago there was nothing and still Sirius was not given a trial. He had to bloody die for his name to be cleared. Well take it from me the Ministry will pay and so will you."

There was a deathly silence in the room and Harry went on very softly now though every word was firm and clear.

"I have lost too much in my seventeen years. My parents died so that I could live. Sirius came rushing only to save me. I am going to do them proud. I will defeat Voldemort and I will live Headmaster." He said ominously and Dumbledore flushed.

"What have you people done anyway? Apart from holding meetings now and then, I mean. One letter, one offensive letter and it was not even in The Daily Prophet and six death eaters are apprehended in the Ministry. Voldemort has told everyone not to attack from now on until they can come with counters for these accusations we have written. So no more attacks from today. He has also removed the mark from every one of his followers and sent them home because I have goaded the Ministry to make checks on random people.

"And Dumbledore, you may be rest assured I am going to continue. I have a great many plans with the astounding wealth I have inherited from my father and Sirius and I will be putting them to good use. I have already obtained the relevant papers and the Ministry approval for all that.

"The goblins have promised to extend any support I need in my endeavors and I am happy I have Remus, Severus and Hermione

with me. I have my parents and Sirius and I am sure I will have the support of the Wizarding World; after all I am doing all this for them. For me it is revenge. For them it is a peaceful life without the horrors of war.”

Snape stood up and went to the center and silently pushed back his sleeve and all of them gasped.

“What plans Harry?’ Molly asked him hesitantly. Dumbledore was still silent and looking at him intently but still to say a word. “We can also help my dear.”

“Briefly Mrs. Weasley, I have approval to start a Day School, an University, an orphanage and a counseling center to help all the half breeds to establish their lives and integrate them slowly but surely into mainstream society.” Harry told her with a sad smile, “You are most welcome Mrs. Weasley if you would like to work with me.” all the others were staring at Harry as if he was an alien and their mouths were hanging open in a very unattractive way.

“Of course Harry we all do. I know that. All these good plans are very nice after all.” She wound down at the harsh look on Dumbledore’s face.

“And you think you will succeed Harry in all this and still defeat Voldemort and bring about changes in the Ministry.” Dumbledore asked speaking for the first time.

“I can try and will do my best to succeed Headmaster.” Harry replied in the same even tone Dumbledore had spoke in.

“And how will you succeed Harry?” he asked still softly. “You have pitted against me, against Voldemort and the Ministry. And you expect to succeed?”

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating Headmaster. So I will not say anything now but you may see for yourself later.” Harry smiled at him.

"You will start a School in competition with Hogwarts?" Dumbledore asked him incredulously, his anger rising at the impertinence Harry had exhibited so far.

"No I never said so." Harry told him calmly.

Dumbledore had enough. He stood up sending his aura of power into the room and everyone suddenly jumped at the magic that was leaking off him. Harry did not even blink his eye.

"This is enough and is the limit. Harry, I have reached the end of my patience with you. I am tired of you gallivanting around and jumping into situations that inevitably bring only loss. Now you have pulled into your mess that has already cost Sirius, these three. Remember you are the child of the prophecy and it is your duty to kill Voldemort.

"And until you do that I am afraid you will have to listen to me and do as I say. As for the other three, I will speak to Severus and Remus in private and Miss. Granger I am very disappointed in you, I am afraid. I had thought better of you. Severus, remember your mark and I sincerely hope you will not get into trouble because of that and Remus is already close to begging his way" Dumbledore was cut off as a furious Harry stood up crashing his chair.

"SHUT UP! How dare you stand here and act so sanctimonious Dumbledore and threaten these three?" Harry roared and he in turn was cut off by Dumbledore who simply shouted at Harry. All the others were stunned as they watched the tug of power between Dumbledore and Harry.

"Harry you are an ungrateful boy and you have admitted here and in the Quibbler that you share a link with Voldemort. You will kindly obey me else I am very much afraid I will have to turn you in as you are a danger to society. You will give your oath here; right now in front of all these people Harry, and you too Severus, Miss. Granger and Remus, and then you will listen to me.

"I have done so much for you tried my best to hide the fact you have so much darkness in you and you are linked inseparably with Voldemort until he dies or you die. I have kept you safe and sound

and this boy! Is how you repay me? One **wrong** word of your link with Voldemort and you will be branded as the next Dark Lord.

“You have been talking in your articles about your link. So my words will only make it true and don’t goad me into making it. You will fight Voldemort and you will do it in the way I tell you to.” Dumbledore roared flashing his aura and power that scared everyone in that room.

Remus had fallen in a faint suddenly and Arthur Weasley silently levitated him and placed him on a chair and quietly stunned him again. Hermione had seen the shaking of his shoulders and had stunned him silently and she thanked Arthur with her eyes as he placed Remus on a chair.

Suddenly the temperature in the room went from being comfortable to downright freezing and the Order members looked at Harry who was radiating so much anger that seemed to come off him in waves. His eyes were dark as they flashed around the room in rage.

“So the great Dumbledore cannot be without his pawn and his weapon can he?” Dumbledore flushed but looked straight on at Harry not giving an inch.

A few minutes later the freezing room was very comfortable and all the members in the room blinked at the change. They looked at Harry and he was normal and smiling. “Remember Dumbledore, you asked for this, not me.” he said mysteriously.

“Respected members I have some personal work with the great leader of the Light. So apart from all the Weasleys, Moody, Lupin, Severus, Hermione, McGonagall, Kingsley Shacklebolt and Tonks I wish for the rest to leave us for sometime until Dumbledore calls for you again. He will believe me and be ready to come when you receive his patronus.”

All of them looked at Dumbledore but he was flushed with triumph and he nodded his eyes still on Harry. “Please do as Harry says. I will call all of you the minute this private conversation is over and inform you.” He said quietly.

All of them left the room reluctantly and went outside to wait.

Harry did not waste a minute and started placing a great many spells aided by Hermione who worked silently with him.

Harry then went and bowed to Mrs. Weasley. "I am sorry Mrs. Weasley, please forgive me." Harry told a bewildered Molly softly and looked straight at Mr. Weasley who was trembling as he nodded once. Molly went to sit with him and he held on to her for dear life. He knew she was going to be devastated. But there was too much at stake and her ignorance in this matter could not be kept in the same status forever.

"I want a promise that all of you will sit in your positions until I finish what I have to say. There will be no shouting and flashing of power, I for one am not impressed," Harry said sneering at Dumbledore, "and I don't want any running away either. So I have taken precautions and have placed all kinds of spells here."

All of them sat down including Snape and Hermione and then Harry smiled, "I have taken the liberty of securing all of you to your seats and I have also," he flicked his hand silencing them as he continued, "made sure that this will be fully finished to the end before any of you can leave this room."

All of them shifted and found themselves bound to their seats. Snape had cast the charms when Harry and Dumbledore had been speaking with each other and he had activated it the moment Dumbledore sat down after the others had left the room.

They opened their mouths to yell but found themselves silenced and unable to move. Dumbledore was very angry and Harry flicked his hand at him once more to make him secure. Dumbledore's eyes widened at the casual use of wandless magic that Harry exhibited.

Harry took out a shrunken pensieve and enlarged it. Dumbledore frowned when Harry placed his wand and lifted a few strands of memories and placed it into the pensieve.

"I Harry James Potter swear on my magic and on my life that the memories I am going to show all of you are wholly and completely true." Harry waited until the swirl of magic came out of his wand and entered him.

Then Harry turned to all of them.

"This memory is about a year and a bit ago. *Watch it and weep Dumbledore.*" Harry told him and tapped the pensieve.

Dumbledore screamed in his mind in horror when he saw Fawkes appearing with the letter and Ron reading it out. He saw Harry in the library pouring book after book and then find the incantations and saw him apply it on himself.

He saw Harry enter the room and all the members saw the first Order meeting and the second Order meeting. Dumbledore was now frantic and Moody was struggling against the bonds and Snape silently flicked his wand once more towards Moody and once more towards Dumbledore.

They saw Fawkes coming in with Ron, Ginny and Percy and the Order meeting where Ron and Ginny were given instructions. Then the small discussion between Dumbledore and Moody and after that the memory stopped.

Harry silently placed all the strands into his head and glared at Ron and Ginny whom he looked at for the first time. They were already trembling in terror and they took one look at Harry and cowered in shame.

"Shall I call them in Dumbledore and show this to all the others too?" Harry asked him the fury in his eyes.

Now Dumbledore and Moody remained silent.

Harry removed all their binds and a loud wail came out of Molly Weasley.

"How dare you?" she began but Harry was not finished.

"Ginny and Ron also placed four *imperios* on me and then went and told Dumbledore about it to get official sanction, didn't they Dumble?" Harry asked him mockingly even as Ron and Ginny cowered under the glares of their family.

“One to make me fall so very much in love with Ginny and stay loyal to Ron and Dumbledore, so sad,” Harry cooed hatefully, “it really did not work out did it? One complaint and you will serve the rest of your lives in Azkaban and that goes for you too, Dumbledore and you have the bloody nerve to tell me to give you an oath to listen to you and write all my wealth to you.”

“Mrs. Weasley,” Harry looked at the sobbing woman, “All the others knew. We did not want to tell you because it would upset you, but Dumbledore’s approach did not give me room to hide it.”

Molly Weasley stood up tears in her eyes and the others in the room who were not with Harry like Molly, Kingsley and Tonks were horrified about what they were hearing about the man they would have followed implicitly to their death thinking he was doing everything to make their world safe and secure.

Molly was devastated, there was no other word, she was devastated when she saw her son and daughter taking the money and ready to betray Harry to whom the whole family owed so much and Molly Weasley loved him as her very own. At the mention of the *imperios* her world had come crashing down her ears.

She went to Dumbledore and slapped him hard on his face and did not notice the shocked silence around her. She was too hurt and too angry.

“How dare you?” she roared. “You are a teacher, a man who teaches values and imparts knowledge to your students. But you,” she spat on his face to the horror of everyone there, “have taught them to steal and be immoral and you intended to rob my child of his money after you robbed him of his parents and Sirius. Now,” she roared, “You have the nerve to come here and demand Harry obey you?”

Molly glared at Dumbledore and Moody, “You may think there is no one for the child Albus, but then like in so many things you would be wrong. I am there, and my family and I do not include the three blood traitors but the rest of us are with Harry. Try anything and I will castrate you and stuff the hole with your beard.”

Albus looked at her, his whole world crumbling around him. Harry on the other hand was amazed and so touched by her defense. He looked proudly at her and smiled hesitantly when she turned to him and taking a step towards him, crushed him in her arms.

"It is not your fault Harry. It is Ron's and Ginny's. You are not to worry." She told him tears running down her face understanding why Arthur and the others had not spoken a single word to them these holidays.

She sat down in her chair and sobbed for her children whom she had lost. No one said anything and they looked at Molly with pity and Arthur crushed her in his arms slowly patting her back, tears running down his cheeks as well.

Harry went to Dumbledore. "I have copies of this memory with a blood oath to attest to it being true and have placed it in Gringotts with explicit instructions to the goblins to release the memory on the day I die, die by whatever means. While I was sleeping when Ron and Ginny cast the imperios on me, there was another student who heard it and that student had also placed the relevant memory in Gringotts and will release it on the day I die.

"So start praying Dumbledore that I don't die before you, because if I do you, Ron and Ginny and Percy will face the rest of your lives in Azkaban along with Moody and I have found a bit of the philosopher's stone in my vault and I have decided that I will ask a friendly auror to administer it and the five of you will be in Azkaban forever.

"You have been warned and do not try anything that is liable to get you down. Now be a good boy and wipe the spit off your face and get out there and tell everyone that you had indeed made mistakes and Harry, poor little boy was so right and all of us must cooperate with him. And don't take your anger on Sev, the other Weasleys and Hermione. I will release a few other memories that will shame you more than this.

"YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED DUMBLEDORE."

Harry finished loudly and went to Molly Weasley and held out his hand and took hers. A second later they had gone leaving a bitter and a fallen leader and his betrayed followers.

All the Weasleys without so much as a glance at Ron and Ginny who were still there frozen and terrified seeing their mother spit on Dumbledore and slap him, thinking all kinds of things that their mother would do to them and shook with terror were shocked and a touch relieved when she disappeared with Harry were taken aback when the others also disappeared leaving them alone in that room with Moody and Dumbledore.

Dumbledore put his head into his hands. How would he go out and what would he tell the others. All his sins had demanded payment at the same time and Dumbledore did not know what to do.

McGonagall looked straight at Tonks and raised her eyebrow and mouthed 'coming?' and Tonks nodded and a second later they had gone. Snape did the same with Kingsley and soon they were standing outside Godric's Hollow. Hermione ran out with a piece of paper and Kingsley and Tonks read it and all of them went inside.

Molly was weeping when Harry apparated with her to Godric's Hollow and wrote something on a piece of paper and held it to her. She read it with blurry eyes full of tears and saw the house and held on to Harry tightly.

Harry gently led her in and she stood in shock when she saw the Slytherins who were there looking very comfortable. She looked at Harry in shock when Hermione apparated and the Slytherins now stood up and watched Molly silently.

"They are with us Mrs. Weasley. Mr. Weasley and the others know them." Harry told her softly as he led her to a sofa and seated her. Pansy went and got her a glass of water and held it to her silently. Molly looked at her for a long moment and took it from her and slowly sipped it, the tears falling from her eyes once again.

End of Chapter – 29

Chapter – 30

Molly Weasley did not know where she had gone wrong with her three children. Ron and Ginny taking money and casting *imperios* was too much for her to bear. She was crying her heart out when Harry suddenly caught hold of her hand and took her away. She landed in a very small village and still weeping she read the piece of paper Harry showed her and suddenly she could see the house.

“Godric's Hollow,” Harry told her softly and led her inside.

She walked in leaning on Harry similarly to the way Arthur had leaned on Bill the other night and went into a comfortable and spacious home to see the others. She was shocked to see the Slytherins and Harry sat her down slowly and she looked for a long moment at Pansy who had appeared with a glass of water before taking it and sipping it slowly.

That was when she saw Arran and her glass almost slipped from her fingers. “Sirius?” she asked him with hopeful eyes.

“No Mrs. Weasley he is Arran Lestrangle the son of Bellatrix Lestrangle.” Harry told her and before she could react, all the Weasleys apparated inside and went straight to their mother.

Hermione looking out of the window saw McGonagall apparate with Tonks. Hermione who had apparated with Remus, and seeing McGonagall asked Harry to write the secret once again just as McGonagall activated her earring and asked Harry to come out.

Harry had burned the paper after Mrs. Weasley had read it and he wrote hurriedly and Hermione ran out with it and soon McGonagall, Snape, Kingsley and Tonks were inside and Molly who was leaning on Arthur were looking at each other and Kingsley very suspiciously at the Slytherins.

“Mr. Weasley can you go into the Ministry today and meet with Amelia Bones and her deputy and bring them back here. I would come with you but it would be a mess there and I would make

matters only worse. I would not have disturbed you,” Harry told him with a swift glance at Molly, “But these two cannot go because they have called in sick.”

“Arthur must go Harry. That work is far more important. I really do not know how this family is going to repair the damage dear.” She told him softly her voice full of shame and choked with grief.

Harry went to her and sat down, placing his hands over her wringing ones. “Mrs. Weasley you are not to take the blame and the consequences of another’s actions. Be it your kids or anybody. It is their fault not yours. None of us here are after their blood; Arran told Bill and Charlie that and all of them here will allow you to deal with your children the way you want to.”

She gasped and looked at him through her tears. “How did you know Harry, I was so frightened about that?” she asked in wonder.

“I will repeat what Arran said the other day to Charlie, Mrs. Weasley. He said all of us were not gathered together to break families but to save ourselves and the world we are living in. Had they been death eaters, killing others, yes then they might have had to pay publicly, here they are all yours.” Harry told her confidently.

She looked around hesitantly at the others and at the boy who looked so much like Sirius and smiled at all of them asking for their concurrence as well.

Arran smiled at her, “Welcome to Harry’s side Mrs. Weasley. I hope you will help us with the projects we have planned to start and also for the small birthday party for ickle Harrykins here. He is seventeen years of age today after all.”

Mrs. Weasley stared at him and then smiled at all of them, her eyes showing her gratitude and relief and she got up and then squealed. “Sirius! And are they Lily and James?”

“At last.” James said dramatically and Sirius grinned and hit him on the head and Lily rolled her eyes and smiled at Mrs. Weasley welcoming her to Godric's Hollow.

Molly wasted no time to get to work. Arthur wiped his eyes and straightened up when he saw Molly push her grief down to deal with it later in private. The moment she did that he knew she would be fine as did the other Weasleys. They looked at each other and smiled for the first time after the fiasco with the *imperios*.

Harry had asked Molly, Tonks and Kingsley to wait until Arthur came with Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler so that he could tell all of them everything at the same time. Arthur had left the moment Molly had started chatting with Lily and soon they were planning for the party. They did not discuss what had happened by mutual consent.

Dobby and Winky were there helping Molly and she was soon planning with Sirius about changing Grimmauld Place also.

"We could remove the décor completely and repaint the walls and remove many things and either throw it off or keep it away in the attic or something, Sirius and make that place look more welcome." She told him.

"Burn the place Molly, I couldn't care less. Burn it with Dumbledore and Moody and you would make a dead man very happy." Sirius told her with a grin and looked sadly at her when she looked down her lips trembling.

"Molly, while Ron and Ginny may be selfish and money minded the blame lies with Dumbledore for manipulating them like this. Punish them surely, but don't kill yourself because of them. Look at me and Reg. We cannot help how we turned out and how our families did." He told her softly.

"I realize that Sirius. I only feel I have failed them in some way." She told him, struggling to stop her tears.

"Why do you look upon it in that manner?" Arran had come up behind her, "See it this way. You have four brilliant kids here and they have you and Mr. Weasley as well. Look at us. We have nobody and if Harry would not help us, we would have died and died for nothing if I may add." Arran told her seriously and she shocked him by hugging him gently and smiling at him.

"You are so right, only that will take some time Arran, if I may call you that. Mr. Lestrangle seems very formal." She grinned a bit shakily when he recoiled in horror at Mr. Lestrangle.

Harry in the meantime had activated his earring and was talking to Neville.

"Hey Neville, can you bring your Gran here tonight? If you can apparate with her outside Godric's Hollow and I will give her the secret of the house. Mr. Weasley has gone to bring Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler and we can have a meeting here to discuss the future. Tell her you will receive an invitation for my birthday; I will send it now by writing in your parchment for both of you and then take it on from there."

Harry heard Neville talk to his Gran and he quickly wrote a formal invitation for Neville and his Gran and he heard Neville show it to her. Five minutes later Harry told everyone that Neville and her Gran would come and he went through the floo to Luna's place and invited her and the father who was busy, Luna told him printing as he never had for extra sales.

Harry brought Luna to Godric's Hollow by giving her the secret and he also told her father.

"Harry, I will not be able to come because I have to oversee the printing. You may take my daughter though." Mr. Lovegood smiled at Harry who grinned back at him, thanking him first and telling him briefly all that had happened.

Then Harry and Luna went inside and greeted everyone and soon all of them were chatting and simply lounging around, the Slytherins and James, Sirius and Lily, hearing about Harry's confrontation with Dumbledore. Hermione had enervated Remus and McGonagall had scolded him.

"You missed all the fun Moony. You are silly." James told him, and Remus smiled, though his eyes were still amber and James and Sirius started speaking urgently to him trying to calm him down.

At seven Neville and his Gran came and stood in front of Godric's Hollow and Hermione was ready with a slip of paper along with Harry and both of them welcomed Neville and his Gran into their home.

Harry did not introduce Neville's Gran to anyone and she frowned when she saw the Slytherins and looked sharply at Arran and Ria. But she did not say a word, though Harry could practically feel her alertness and her readiness for any situation.

By seven Arthur had not come back and Molly told Harry not to wait for him and Harry cut his first birthday cake blushing furiously. James, Sirius and Lily looked on with tears in their eyes and all the others sang loud and long.

Bill's earring activated at that moment and he told the others Charlie was in Godric's Hollow at the edge of the village and did not know where to go. Harry wrote the secret and five minutes later Charlie was there and he stopped seeing Molly. Bill dragged him aside and told him briefly what had happened. Charlie's face grew red and after some more talking by Bill he came and wished Harry a very happy birthday, though his face showed his anger and concern.

No one had got gifts and Hermione smiled when Harry hugged her and blushed when Harry fed her a small piece of cake and the others catcalled. Molly smiled and she realized it was Harry and Hermione and that was why Harry did not so much as even look at Ginny, not that Ginny deserved such a nice boy, she thought sadly.

The elves had prepared a wonderful dinner and all of them ate discussing only ordinary things.

After dinner, Harry took them to the study and was about to start when he heard Arthur Weasley asking him to come outside. Harry ran along with McGonagall and Bill and there Harry shook hands with Amelia Bones and her deputy Brian Wheeler.

"Hello Madam Bones, Mr. Wheeler, please come inside." Harry told her smiling and he gave her and Brian the secret of Godric's Hollow.

Both Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler smiled at Harry and went into the house very curiously. They had had a mad day at the Ministry and

Amelia Bones and Brian had been the only persons receiving the Quibbler and they had taken prompt action.

All through the chaotic day Amelia had thought about the fallout between Dumbledore and Harry Potter. She had wondered what had happened. When Arthur had come there and had invited her and Brian to come she had agreed for both of them at once knowing she was going to know a lot of things.

Brian had likewise agreed with her but they had not been able to get away until much later. Arthur had waited to apparate them to Godric's Hollow and now she entered the house in anticipation.

There was no one in the living room and Harry called for the elves to bring something for them and smiled at them.

"I will be taking you to the study and I request only one thing. Please wait for me to explain before you react at whoever is there inside." Harry told her and smiled when she took out her wand and looked at her deputy who mirrored her actions and holding it at the ready she turned to Harry.

"Lead on, Mr. Potter." She said with a smile.

Harry smiled back at her nervously and led her and her deputy inside.

Amelia Bones was surprised. There was such an odd group sitting around a table and talking amongst themselves. Then she saw the Slytherins and she frowned when she spotted Draco.

"That surely is Malfoy." She told Harry sharply.

"Yes Madam. That is Draco Malfoy, but there are others too. That is Pansy Parkinson, Blaise Zabini and," Harry hesitated and looked at Neville for a moment. Neville nodded once and Harry turned to Amelia Bones, "and this is Arran Lestrangle, the son of Bellatrix and his cousin Ria, the daughter of Rabastan Lestrangle."

There was a huge crash as a chair went and smashed the wall.

“How dare you Mr. Potter?” How dare you call me here and ask me to break bread with the son of that ***bitch?*** Mrs. Longbottom roared and she took her wand and flicked it so fast at Arran that he would have been stunned had he not instinctively reacted and ducked avoiding the stunner. She was about to flick another one when Harry removed the wand from her shaking hands.

Mrs. Longbottom was shaking in rage and fury and she looked down and glared at Neville and was about to leave the room.

“I thought better of you Mr. Potter and I came only because I was impressed with the way you fought in the Ministry last year and your attacks today. but to join hands with the children of a torturer and a murderess, that speaks not so well about you. COME ON Neville. The sooner we will be away from here, the better.”

“Have you finished Mrs. Longbottom?” Harry asked her coldly and she blinked at his offensive tone and shivered as the room temperature dipped by several degrees.

She looked up haughtily. “Surely you cannot justify moving with death eaters Mr. Potter?” she said not giving an inch.

“If you will sit down here for about an hour you will know all about death eaters and integrities Mrs. Longbottom. You have come here and while I can understand your concern about the Lestrangle name and the distrust that accompanies it, I cannot allow you to speak so ill of Arran and Ria just because they are unfortunate to bear that name. You will surely agree with me on that?” Harry asked her quietly.

“Are you saying they are NOT death eaters Mr. Potter?” she challenged.

“They are death eaters. I do not deny that.” Harry said quietly and watched from the corner of his eyes as Amelia and Brian went on alert.

“But I also have their oath on their magic that they will aid me in this war and they will not seek revenge for the death of their families and in all their cases it will be their parents and siblings. If that is not

enough for you, yes then maybe you need not be here.” Harry told her very firmly.

Mrs. Longbottom stared at Harry and then at the others. “Show me their oaths.” She asked Harry abruptly.

“Gladly. But before that I wish to tell all of you something. The ones who have joined us today, Mrs. Longbottom, Mrs. Weasley, Mr. Shacklebolt, Tonks, Madam Bones and Mr. Wheeler. Please sit down Mrs. Longbottom.” Harry told Mrs. Longbottom flicking his wand at the chair; she stared at him and sat down warily and still alertly. Harry gave Mrs. Longbottom’s wand back to her and went to stand at the head of the table.

“It all started last year. After the fiasco at the Department of Mysteries where I lost my Godfather; I was blessed to have found Severus Snape and professor McGonagall. Along with Hermione Granger who is my best friend and who agreed to fight this war with me at a time when I was all alone, I started preparing for a war I knew would come sooner or later to our doors.

“On my birthday last year, I was captured and was about to be killed by Voldemort but was saved by none other than Arran LeStrange who later met with me along with his cousin Ria and three other Slytherins, Draco, Pansy and Blaise. They gave me their oath on their magic to help me and also to never seek revenge on the deaths of their families and that has already been proved by Rabastan’s death who was captured by Arran and was removed of all his magic by him.”

Amelia gasped, “You know ancient magic?”

Arran nodded. “Yes.” he replied.

Harry continued as Amelia Bones turned to look speculatively at him. “I cannot show you the memory of that day because it also contains personal stuff, but I can ask them to retake the oath in front of you, the same oath they took then or better still I can take an oath saying that all I told you just now is true. That cannot be false and please all they are asking in return is that they be allowed to live their lives in peace without the type of reaction that Arran got just now.”

“So that was why you asked me to come.” Amelia told Harry.

Harry nodded. “Even if something happened to me, I wanted as many people as I could trust to have this information so that these people who have sacrificed the maximum with no returns whatsoever, are not once again going to be punished for being born in a family they could not help.

“Just before School ended Draco, Pansy and Blaise brought almost all the sixth year Slytherins and three seventh years and Terry Boot from Ravenclaw. They had had enough of the killings and they too have given me an oath on their magic to never fight for Voldemort and to never seek revenge and never to harm muggleborns.” Harry paused there and looked around at everyone. Arran was staring at him his eyes swirling with an emotion Harry could not discern. Then Harry turned to Amelia Bones.

“I Harry James Potter swear on my magic that all I have told you until now is true.” A swirl of magic came out of Harry’s wand and surrounded him and went inside him.

“As I am still standing, I have spoken only the truth. So now I will take your questions, if you have any.”

Mrs. Longbottom sighed and looked at Arran and then flushed slightly and turned away.

“Why don’t you like Albus and what do you want me and Brian to do?” Amelia Bones asked Harry the first question.

“I don’t like Dumbledore and Moody because they are as bad as Voldemort, but in a different way.”

“That is a serious accusation to make Mr. Potter.” Amelia observed. No one was talking and Harry was so much in command of the situation. Even Snape and McGonagall were not saying a word and were looking up to this boy.

She was very interested now and she looked at Harry for his answer.

"I found out last year in an Order meeting that I gate crashed. Only it was no a regular Order meeting but a meeting that took place after the regular stuff.

"Dumbledore and Moody were in conversation and I found out from them that day that I had more than sixty percent of my magic bound and all of my gifts bound as well. They were planning to release my magic when I came to face with Voldemort so that both of us would die and Dumbledore would look all sad and helpless. Oh and I was somehow to make a will transferring all my money for the reparation of the Wizarding World and make Dumbledore in charge of its distribution. That is why I like him so much and he is very much my favorite person."

Harry felt rather than saw the gratitude of the Weasleys when he did not mention Ron and Ginny's role to Amelia and Brian.

Amelia Bones was shocked. She looked at her deputy and saw he was as shocked as he was.

"But why did you approach me? Us?" she asked puzzled.

"Because I had a hunch you were not very keen on Dumbledore yourself." Harry told her with a smile and grinned as she stiffened.

She automatically opened her mouth to say all that was rubbish when she realized she was in the center of the Dumbledore haters. She smiled.

"How did you know? Humor me please."

"I told him Amelia." Arthur spoke quietly. "I saw you and Brian here with a very distasteful expression when you saw Albus in the Ministry, only for a second mind you, before you both wiped it off your faces, but that was enough for me to try and get to know you better. Only you did not even give me the time of the day." Arthur smiled.

Amelia Bones was shocked and then angry with herself for having been very careless. She was silent for a few minutes and then she looked at Harry.

“What do you want us to do Mr. Potter? Yes I am not very happy with Albus and it has shocked me that Moody of all people is plotting to kill you and take over your wealth. Then what different are we from the side we are fighting against. Albus hates the House of Slytherin. Why I do not know but he does not like it and after he became Head of Gryffindor and Transfiguration professor, you will find the House rivalries reaching new heights.

He was the creator of Voldemort, in my opinion. He discriminated and put him and the Slytherins down all the time, I was there as was Minnie and while none of us were clever enough then, to see the subtly discriminating treatment that would create so much of problem later, I have especially after Brian here,” she flashed a quick look at her deputy who was largely silent and smiled.

“After Brian joined me a few years ago, both of us realized how deep the manipulations of Dumbledore are and how much they have cost us. So yes I do not like him, but I never thought Moody was with him. That is a low blow.”

“I was a Ravenclaw, Mr. Potter,” Brian Wheeler told Harry and the others quietly. “There were so many instances where the Gryffindors would simply get away with anything, even murder. Dumbledore would just twinkle, cast compulsion charms for us to agree with him and get along.”

“What?” a dozen voices sounded in shock and anger.

“I am an empath, Mr. Potter and I have always distrusted Dumbledore.” Harry and Snape looked for a moment at each other. Brian saw that look, “Are you one?”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “But my Godfather’s brother was. His name was Regulus Black and he died because he was disillusioned with Voldemort and tried to work against him. He was a friend of Severus and both of them were forced to stay with Voldemort because they had no other alternative. After Regulus was killed Severus came to Dumbledore and Dumbledore accepted him once he offered to spy.”

Amelia Bones looked at Snape who nodded. "Who would give us asylum Madam Bones? No one. I had to make all sorts of promises to spy for him, so that Regulus's death would not be in vain. I am still treated as scum and still have the threat of Azkaban hanging over my head if I put a step wrong. That at all cost I wish to avoid for these children who have been through so much."

"Please continue Mr. Wheeler." Harry told the deputy who smiled at Harry, when Harry asked him. "How did you know Dumbledore was placing compulsion charms on students?"

"A Ravenclaw is very analytical and extremely logical. Of all the articles you printed today, the theory on blood purity was what I appreciated, although I could understand the importance of the open note that would capture the whole Wizarding World. All of us would go to Dumbledore, and by all of us I mean my friends, who were in Ravenclaw and Slytherin, and we would complain to him about something the Gryffindors did; something serious mind you, something that warranted a professor's intervention, and nine times out of ten we would come away feeling very comforted and thinking nice things about our Headmaster."

"This happened a few times before we smelt a rat and then we started thinking. We went to the Room of Requirement, of course we knew about it, and asked it for a pensieve and saw our memories and found out. We were enraged and from then on, the first rule the Ravenclaws and the Slytherins taught to the younger ones was 'hit back and take the punishment but do not go to the Head of Gryffindor.'"

There was silence after that.

"Why did you not go to Flitwick?" McGonagall asked him.

"Oh we did. When we did we got a fair deal, always. It was when we were caught by Dumbledore or when Gryffindors were involved that there were problems. It took us the better part of our School years to figure it out but eventually we got there in our sixth year."

"The thing is if he is placing compulsion charms on students, then what else is he doing?" Harry asked the others.

That led to an open discussion between Amelia Bones, Brian Wheeler, the Weasleys, Snape, McGonagall, Kingsley and Tonks. Arran came to Harry and dragged him to one side.

“What is it? Did I not speak properly?” Harry asked him. The other Slytherins were there too and to Harry’s surprise Arran hugged him tightly.

“Hey!” Harry told him as he hugged him back. “What happened?” Harry had never seen Arran of all people so emotional. He was always cool and he never let anyone know what he was thinking at any point.

“Thank you.” Arran said very quietly.

“But why?” Harry was puzzled.

“You are really very clueless ickle Harrykins.” Arran smiled, his eyes flashing with some emotion as he looked at Harry.

Harry shook his head. “I am really clueless oh big brother Arran. Please take mercy on me and help me out.” Harry teased.

“No one Harry, no one has ever stood up as you did today for us.” It was Ria who answered as Arran flushed. “No one really cared and the way your anger froze the room, well no one has cared.” She finished with a hug. Harry hugged her fiercely.

“Arran, Ria, all of you, you are family. I don’t have anybody else and none of you do either. We are family and I did what you would do for me. If you will thank me for that then maybe you have not accepted me as I have you.” Harry told him blushing and then suddenly grinned, “And Sev is Papa.”

Arran smiled his heart suddenly light and ruffled Harry’s hair and then they settled down to plan. They had a general outline of what they wanted to accomplish in the one month and Harry wanted it done in the immediate aftermath of these articles.

“I think you are right. Now the other Slytherins will also cooperate and this time when father and Bella are busy writing retaliating articles, is

when we should attack.” this was Draco with an arm slung over Ria’s shoulder.

“Arran, Ria, Draco and the others will be captured as far as Voldemort is concerned and there will be no news for the rest of the Wizarding World.” Harry told him.

“So Voldemort will be isolated and then we shall see what he does. When will we attack?” Hermione asked generally, snuggling by Harry’s side.

“That is what Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler should tell us; but I think it should be as early as tomorrow.” Harry told her looking at the elders who were still talking, no badmouthing Dumbledore.

Harry got up, it was getting late and he wanted this finalized and the cooperation of the aurors assured before everyone left. He got up from beside Hermione and went up to the others and smiled at all of them. The others stopped, “Yes Harry, come we have been getting carried away, I am afraid.” McGonagall told him with a smile but her eyes were very sad.

All the Slytherins came and seated around the table once more and all of them looked at Harry expectantly.

“We have been talking for very long now, almost a year about how to attack the death eaters and then target Voldemort. Voldemort has horcruxes made,”

“What?” Amelia Bones was stunned.

“Yes Madam Bones.” Harry told her briefly about the horcruxes and how Rabastan was captured and then left to die.

Amelia Bones looked at Arran and smiled and Harry’s heart suddenly lifted.

“While we have been discussing the general outlines we had been unsure of how to go about the particulars. Now I think we have a way.” Harry told all of them.

“Speak on.” Arran grinned at Harry.

“Well what I think is this. Now we know from Sev that Voldemort has taken time off from attacking. This is the time we should go on the offensive. One day or rather one night I think we will attack all the Inner and Outer Circle death eaters and we fight to kill.”

Amelia Bones started at that. “What do you mean by that Harry? I thought you of all people would insist on a trial.”

“Sure have a trial where you are not convinced about the man or woman in question. Don’t have a trial for Bellatrix Lestrangle and Alecto and Rookwood, Madam Bones. That is insulting. Kill them quietly and say they were killed in self defense.

“Arran and the others would have killed their parents long ago but after that? They would have had to hide from Voldemort and the Ministry. Last year we were not prepared to bring down the wards and take them on. We were very few. This year, this time I think we can.”

“But kill?” Amelia Bones said doubtfully. “Mr. Potter if anyone comes to know you realize the amount of trouble it would cause.”

“That was why we all gave our oaths. Mr. Weasley, professor McGonagall, Sev, even Bill have killed in these last few months. Hell I have cast a dark enough curse to kill a death eater when I went on a raid last year. I balked too Madam Bones until Sev told me he killed a death eater in cold blood because he was asking a six year old boy to rape his mother, both of them under the *imperious*.

“Those types of people should not get trial. Have a trial for those who want to redeem them selves. If you catch Nott or Boot, have a trial and send them free. They don’t want this mad killing everyday. But silently kill Bellatrix and Lucius Malfoy and Mrs. Zabini who is a necromancer and is in charge of creating the inferi.

“Now they also have their marks removed because Voldemort does not want any of them to get caught as a death eater and punished. He has lost six of them today and three were his very important ones in the Inner and Outer Circles. So we must get them before they start

regrouping and once again start with their activities of torture and killing.”

Amelia Bones was taken aback. “You-Know-Who has removed the marks?”

In answer Arran and Severus and Draco showed her their clean forearms.

“I am going to trust you Madam Bones. He has not removed them, merely changed them to another inconspicuous place and has hidden it with a Parsel spell to avoid all known means of detection. Apart from veritaserum combined with a powerful truth spell there is no way today to find out a death eater. But we have an advantage. We know the death eaters; the main ones. We take them.” Harry finished intensely staring at Amelia Bones.

“I am in. What should I do? Surely you are not going to send me away without taking my oath?” Brian Wheeler asked Harry.

“You are in?” Amelia Bones asked incredulously.

“I am in too Harry” Kingsley said and Tonks nodded her head. “I will give my oath too.”

“So will I.” Molly Weasley shocked everyone. “What? If you think I am going to let any one make six year old children do such things, I am going to rip them apart.” She told everyone who was staring at her their mouths wide open.

“We do not take the law into our own hands Madam Bones. Please do not think that. What we will be doing is to make sure certain death eaters will never hurt or break up families again.”

“Please count me in Mr. Potter. I owe you an apology and to you too, young man.” Mrs. Longbottom said stiffly looking defiantly at Harry and then briefly glancing at Arran.

Harry smiled warmly at her. “No problem Mrs. Longbottom.”

Arran did not say anything but just inclined his head slightly.

A long minute later Amelia spoke quietly, "Okay, count me in too, but remember this should not be the norm. This exercise is an exception; a one off thing and I want you to tell me the names of the death eaters you will kill. The rest is mine to stand trial and be locked away."

"Sure." Harry told her and looked at Snape and Arran.

Arran stood up and came to the center and pulled Harry back to stand with him, when Harry was about to go and sit down.

"The death eaters are my parents and grand parents, Lucius Malfoy, Pansy's elder brother, Mrs. Zabini and Alecto. These kill for fun. You already have Avery, Rookwood and McNair. They should be killed all of them. McNair was one of the worst.

"The Slytherins in the sixth year and three in the seventh have all given Harry their oaths. He will give you their names in a minute. So don't capture them or if you do, let them off. Their parents come under the category of standing trial and imprisonment and not kill at sight unless they are killed in combat. Severus will also give you all the names of the death eaters who have joined the service of Voldemort until now.

"After we finish this successfully you may handle the persons on the list by process of trial and imprisonment. We will not come near you for them and nor do you need to kill them at sight.

"What we should do is to stage a revolt on the same day. Now I cannot take my parents and grandparents together. You will need more than one person to finish off Lucius." Arran was silent for a minute then very quietly he added.

"And for all that is said and done, they are our parents and the only family we have. So it would be better if I, Draco, Ria, Blaise and Pansy would attack else where while you take care of our respective families. I could take care of Alecto and Draco and Pansy could take care of Mrs. Zabini, Blaise and Ria could take on Pansy's brother.

"Harry, Severus and Bill could attack the Lestrangle family. You, Madam Bones and Mr. Wheeler can take on the Malfoys. I am not

sure of Narcissa. So please don't kill her, but stand a private trial for her and then we can take a decision." Arran fell silent.

"What about the rest of us?" Arthur asked.

"Back up. You are dealing with some of the most brilliant wizards and witches in the Wizarding World. Please be very careful. They are persons who kill just because they can." Arran told him.

"All of us who are not involved in the main attack will be the back up for the Inner Circle members. The aurors can take over the rest. Arran, Draco, Pansy, Blaise and the others will come away here and so will not be captured. If any of the Slytherins and Terry Boot are in the list of those who have taken the oath are captured, please release them."

Amelia Bones could not help it. She was very impressed by this young man. She smiled at him and nodded.

"At the same time all your aurors must gate crash the other death eaters. Remember, none of the other death eaters should even think of coming to the Inner Circle death eaters help or worse, they should not go running to the Dark Lord for help." Snape added.

Amelia nodded in agreement and then once it was agreed who will attack where, they started drawing plans for the most important stage of the war. A huge blow. Harry took the oaths of all of them and then they started to plan.

End of Chapter – 30

Chapter – 31

At Grimmauld Place after Harry had apparated with Molly Weasley

After Harry had apparated along with Molly, Dumbledore slowly looked up to see only Moody who was bending down his head in his hands and saw Ginny sobbing. Ron was shaking too, but his eyes were dry and full of fear.

No one had stayed to even shout at them and that was what terrified Ron. Ginny knew there would be no redemption for her and Ron and bitterly rued the day she had accepted money to spy on Harry. Now that money would not bring her anything, happiness, richness, dignity, respect nothing. She was an empty can, a broken empty can of no use to any other.

Ron was flabbergasted. In a space of an hour he had lost his life. He shuddered at the implications of Harry, Hermione, there his face twisted – she was with him; and his parents leaving them alone and without even a word of anger or sadness.

Harry had seen him and Ginny in the Order meeting and his parents and Hermione had sided with him. Harry had looked amazing and a burst of jealousy burst through Ron and twisted his soul. He wondered bitterly if now Harry and Hermione would replace them with his parents and he and Ginny would be thrown aside.

He looked at his sobbing sister but he really felt no remorse for having to spy on a boy who was his best friend. This was a job for which he was being paid by the Headmaster. Harry was so foolhardy and always rushing into everything that he needed someone to tell him to slow down.

Ron also knew Harry had a good percent of his magic bound so that he would not hurt anyone with his short temper. Harry also had a link with Voldemort that made him very dangerous and unstable. Percy was right and Ron always had a spot of sympathy with Percy whom

he had written in secret and had met later behind the woods of The Burrow.

Ron had been helping the Headmaster since Harry's third year and was also accepting money from him from that time. Ginny was helping Dumbledore with Ron since her second year but she was to check up on Hermione.

Both the brother and sister did not realize they had betrayed a friend, had accepted money to sell Harry and Hermione out and had gone to the extent of casting an unforgivable at Harry and concealing the knowledge of Harry's bound powers and gifts that Ron had known since fifth year. Had those powers been released, Harry would have done far better in Occlumency and would have even detected a false vision that ultimately led to the death of Sirius.

Now though, their lives looked bleak. Harry had come to know about their betrayal and more importantly, he had removed the binds on his power and had harnessed his gifts. He looked good, Ron thought bitterly and he also had the money and the power and the people. Ron was very bitter.

Dumbledore though was feeling the worst. All his plans had come to naught. He had carefully planned and executed everything for the past so many years, why years, decades and his life's work had come crumbling down in one hour. All his respect, his power, Dumbledore had no illusions.

McGonagall, Kingsley and everyone who was here had left. The Weasleys did not even dignify their youngest children with a shouting. They had simply left. That more than anything else sounded ominous to Albus Dumbledore.

What would he go out and tell the members whom he hoped had left for their homes by now. He really had no answers. After his high handedness with Harry, how could he tell the other members that he had manipulated the boy to such an extent that Harry if he so wished could very easily land him in Azkaban and for extra punishment land him in the same cell Sirius was in.

The way James Potter had written left no doubts in the minds of anyone that Sirius was innocent and Dumbledore had not used his authority to demand a trial for that man. He sighed in utter despair.

Harry had such grand plans for the Wizarding World and he, Albus Dumbledore would have loved to be in the thick of it all, now though he knew he could not get to even shouting distance of Harry and the others.

From being in supreme control he had gone to being totally controlled. Dumbledore smiled bitterly to himself. Not even Snape who was always respectful and took Albus's lack of respect for him as his fate for becoming a death eater would now give him the time of day.

And he could no longer subtly threaten Snape with the mark, because Voldemort had removed it. He shook his head, trying not to cry. He was sure he would be removed from Hogwarts too and while he had manipulated everyone he had always justified it to himself for it being necessary for the greater good.

Albus Dumbledore had lost everything. He had lost the name, the fame, the respect and the position he held all his in society. All because he decided to manipulate others for his cause which he justified to him as the right cause for the Wizarding World.

Now Dumbledore had the lousiest job available. To troubleshoot for him self.

He had to go out there and campaign for Harry. He knew that. He had to make everyone think – Dumbledore shook his head in desperation when he realized he really did not know what to make anyone think.

He stayed there for the rest of the afternoon in absolute silence with Moody, Ron and Ginny who had long since stopped sobbing and was now looking sightlessly at the wall opposite her.

It was almost evening when Dumbledore cleared his throat and looked at the others. "I have decided to say that Harry was very angry with me because I did not do enough for Sirius and that I left him in his aunt's house where he was not treated well. He is very angry with me at the moment and I will have to accept his anger for the mistakes

I have committed. Nothing more. Harry will not contradict me I hope. I will send him an owl seeking a meeting with him and there I will apologize to him and all of you will also, I hope apologize to him.”

Moody nodded his head at once and Ron and Ginny flushed. They would have to eat humble pie. And the equation would never be the same. They would no longer be the friends of Harry Potter. They would be the ones with whom Harry would not talk and Ginny shuddered at the questions that would arise at the fallout between Harry, Hermione, Ron and her.

Dumbledore decided to let Harry cool off for the day and send Fawkes to him the next morning.

Moody was feeling ashamed and he had joined Dumbledore only after he had seen the Black aura of Harry and had been paranoid enough to want Harry killed simply because he had a mental bond with Voldemort. From then on he had become Albus's partner, though he had never been greedy for money or anything else from the Potter vaults, he had been practical enough to tell Albus to look out for the money and try and get control of it for the restoration of the Wizarding World.

Dumbledore and Moody got up and without a word apparated to Diagon Alley. They went to The Leaky Cauldron and called for a meeting of the members there. He was careful not to call those who had seen the memories with him; the Weasleys, McGonagall and the rest not that they would come at once, he thought with a bitter smile. He had lost that kind of control in the morning.

All the members were there in about three minutes telling Dumbledore how anxious they were to hear his side.

They were sorely disappointed for there was no his side.

All of them took a whole portion of The Leaky Cauldron and sat down ordering drinks and looking at each other waiting for Dumbledore to speak.

The Leaky Cauldron was full today for the first time since Voldemort was seen at the Department of Mysteries two years ago. Since then Tom the barkeep had only been cleaning the already clean tables and looking forlornly at everyone who would flood in and then rush to the wall to enter Diagon Alley.

Today all that had changed.

Tom usually allowed Mr. Lovegood to place his copies of the Quibbler here for sale. He would keep about a hundred copies and wait until they were sold off and then print another batch and keep them in The Leaky Cauldron. Contrary to the magazine being fortnightly, Mr. Lovegood did not print new editions of the paper every fifteen days.

He did after about two months and in those two months he would wait for the copies to be sold off, which was very rare. But after two months he could not wait lest he lost the rare regulars and so he would print a new edition and once again hope to sell all of it in the next two months.

He had made a good bit of money when Harry had given his interview to Rita Skeeter two years ago, though he scarcely realized it. He was not money minded and he was truly fascinated in the strange creatures that both he and his daughter insisted they existed.

He also had been in Ravenclaw and both Luna and he had a strong sense of loyalty and a great sense of daring, qualities that could have made them good Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors. Both of them were also brilliant, the naturally brilliant Ravenclaws and were also highly intuitive. The only House they would not have fitted in was Slytherin, because they had no ambition and were highly lacking in the clever cunning that any self respecting Slytherin would possess.

When Arthur Weasley came requesting his help, he and Luna understood it was more important than that interview Harry gave two years ago. This was on a bigger scale and it would help the Wizarding World against the evil that was threatening to swallow it. He had not hesitated after that and to ask for money when he had it with him was a foreign concept and he had money to print this and distribute it free of cost for the next five months.

So that was what he had done and he came late that morning on Harry's birthday, placed the new set of the Quibbler smiled his thanks as always to old Tom and had flood back.

Tom smiled back and did not even look at the headlines as he continued to polish away his already clean top sighing and thinking as usual of the good old days.

It was about two hours later that the first rush came. All of them flood into The Leaky Cauldron and Tom, by now had stopped looking hopeful every time someone flood in, went on cleaning, now polishing his glasses, when some one said, 'Four Firewhisky please, Tom.'

Tom had looked up incredulously and had hastened to bring the Firewhisky lest the man ran off. When after half an hour all the hundred copies of the Quibbler had been sold out Tom was wondering if he had missed something.

He was now running to supply some hot stew and chilled butter beer when Mr. Lovegood came with another hundred copies, placed then in the rack, took the money out and flood away.

Ten minutes later Tom noticed the Quibbler had not only been replaced but was once again in danger of being sold off, he went there and put the few Knuts in and picked up the copy.

And then dropped it in terror and looked around in fear to see if anyone had caught with a paper that spoke bad things of You-Know-Who. No one was looking at him and he rushed to pick up the copy and stuffed it inside his pockets and went trembling to the counter.

It took him another ten minutes to realize that everyone was here for the Quibbler and all the copies had the same information on it and everyone was reading it. That stopped him sweating and he now paid careful attention to all that was going on.

Everywhere it seemed, people were awed and were discussing initially in hushed whispers but gradually as the day went on they became bold. There was the life debt that was the primary thing and after all the fuss *he* kicked up about the Wizarding World being fit only for pure bloods, You-Know-Who was a half blood and he was

conceived as a result of a love potion of all things. Tom decided that these things kind of made you less afraid of the so called Dark Lord.

Then they actually laughed at You-Know-Who and they discussed the fact that even a muggleborn thought it necessary to make their world secret and there were loud and hilarious discussions on what would happen if the muggles came in?

In the evening a group of people that were totally contrary to the ones who had been there all day walked in solemnly. They waited and then took their seats right at the back of The Leaky Cauldron and were unusually silent and seemed to be waiting for someone to come in.

The Quibbler had been sold out six times in that one day and unnoticed by anyone Mr. Lovegood who seemed to know when the copies were down to the last five came in, silently replaced a hundred more and went off to print again.

Tom had never been busy like this for a long, long time and secretly in his hearts, he blessed the great Harry Potter lad for bringing him such good fortune. He hoped the boy would also kill off You-Know-Who once and for all and keep the Wizarding World as it was today happy, and Tom full of work and The Leaky Cauldron full of people.

It was when Tom was secretly blessing and dreaming as he took orders and rushed to give them all they asked for, Dumbledore flood in and The Leaky Cauldron suddenly was silent.

Dumbledore and Moody who flood behind him flushed as everyone turned to look at them and then the whispers started. Dumbledore now red with shame and embarrassment walked swiftly to the back where the Order members were sitting.

He sat down and Moody sat down along with him. He looked at all of them and then to the silent room where everyone was staring at him, wondering why Harry and his family had attacked him so.

Dumbledore on the spur of the moment decided to speak to everyone here, explain to them about Harry and also tell them that Harry was on the right track and the Wizarding World would do well to listen to

Harry and support him in everything. He could try and salvage at least something that way.

He stood up and wiping his sweating brow he smiled at everyone and nodded amicably.

"I presume all of you are curious about why Harry is so angry with me. I have come here only to move around and to tell all of you that Harry is indeed very angry with me because I left him in his aunt's place and did not do enough to get Sirius a trial. I am very sorry about it now and I feel very bad for the young boy who trusted me so much. I have let him down."

Dumbledore was very bitter inside as he spoke very affably on the outside. But this had to be done and he had to somehow make sure Harry would not take his name again in articles he or his father and Sirius would write.

He had to show he was sorry and he was contrite before they would write something that would demand an investigation into his past activities. After all Harry told him he had other memories that would shame him more and Dumbledore shuddered inside as he smiled affably on the outside.

There was silence only for a minute and then Dumbledore was pounced upon by everyone who demanded answers. The Leaky Cauldron became full as the time went past and slowly Dumbledore answered time again and again and almost lost his voice by explaining about his mistakes and Harry's path being correct.

He said he was mistaken about the opening of their world to the muggleborns and tiredly explained everything over and over again, did all of them leave well after two A.M in the morning and that too only because Albus Dumbledore lost his voice finally and everyone realized he would not be able to tell them everything all over again.

Tom almost became a rich man in that one day and Mr. Lovegood came at two ten in the morning to place yet another set of the Quibbler and went back. Dumbledore went to Hogwarts and fell into his chair, not having the energy to go into his bedroom and sleep. He slept placing an alarm to wake him up at seven in the morning.

Promptly at seven on the 1st of august Dumbledore was woken up and he stretched himself feeling very stiff and uncomfortable for having slept in his chair all night. He took out a parchment and wrote Harry.

Dear Harry,

I write to seek an appointment with you simply to apologize. I realize with shame that I have been less than fair to you and yours. I wish to meet and make amends. To that extent I have already started by going over to The Leaky Cauldron yesterday and met with tens of hundreds of people there and told them that I, indeed did make a mistake and Harry and his father are very much in the right to condemn me openly.

Please forgive me and tell me what else I can do to make you understand that I truly repent.

Yours in apology,

Albus

P.S Please tell me where and when, may I meet you to apologize and I will understand if you never want to see my face ever again.

He called softly to Fawkes, "I have well and truly messed up my friend. This time there will be no forgiveness and no coming back." He told his friend softly, his voice still hoarse and his eyes welling up with tears.

"I was so mistaken that Harry would be bad because of the link Fawkes and that one mistake has cost me everything. Now go and give this to Harry and let us hope he will be able to forgive me at least after twenty years from now, if ever."

Fawkes trilled softly soothing a little of the agitation in Albus Dumbledore's breast and then disappeared with a flash of fire.

At Godric's Hollow

Harry and the others were up to the time Dumbledore was in The Leaky Cauldron, planning and plotting for the downfall of Voldemort's death eaters. It was a little more than two in the morning by the time all of them dispersed and the Weasleys left for Grimmauld Place, Amelia Bones and her deputy for their homes along with Tonks and Shacklebolt and the rest to bunk down in Godric's Hollow.

Harry went to his bed tiredly his head swimming with too many details about everything. It had been a long and a stressful day and Harry slept the second his head touched his pillow.

He was awakened by a soft trill and slowly opened his reluctant eyes and looked blearily at Fawkes who trilled once again and Harry suddenly felt comforted.

"What's the matter?" he groaned as he turned and flopped into his pillow.

Fawkes trilled again and patiently waited for a few minutes for Harry to be fully aware and get up.

Harry stretched after five minutes and glared a little at the bird before he smiled resignedly.

"What has he done now?" he murmured as he took the letter and read it. After a few minutes when it looked as if Fawkes was not leaving without a reply, Harry shook his head.

"No Fawkes. I cannot reply now. I need time to even consider it. He hurt me too badly." He told the intelligent bird softly and a second later Fawkes disappeared in a flash of fire.

Harry could not go back to sleep and he got up and washed and went to Snape's room and slowly opened the door. Snape was just stretching himself awake and he smiled when he saw Harry's face.

Harry walked in once he saw Snape was awake and silently handed the letter to him. Snape frowned and took the letter and read it and snorted softly.

"Now wants to ask for forgiveness. Very convenient." He smiled at Harry, "You will act fussy and keep him in his place won't you? Let him sweat a little."

"He wanted a reply. Fawkes wouldn't leave. But I told Fawkes that it was too soon. Yesterday afternoon he flashes his power and demands I take an oath to obey him and today morning I get a letter like this?" Harry asked him, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Yes, but Harry you have very highly incriminating memories. What else can he do? As I said, let him sweat a little, hell, let him sweat a lot. In about three days we are close to closing down the works of Voldemort. If Albus had tried he could have worked wonders and without all of you suffering like this."

"You called him by name." Harry told Snape astonished that Snape had called Voldemort by name instead of the Dark Lord as he usually did.

"I have no more need to pretend, not on a full scale as before and if we are successful, then we can really put all this in the past and get along with our lives." Snape told Harry simply and he hugged Harry briefly and then he got up to wash and get ready for the day.

Harry went down to find Arran, Hermione and the others awake and he handed the letter to Arran who read it aloud.

"Harry don't forgive him." Hermione told him angrily. "What right has he to ask for your forgiveness when until yesterday he wanted you to be under his thumb and die for you? It took the memories that would place him in Azkaban for the rest of his sweet life and the lie that you would feed him with the Philosopher's stone and make him live in Azkaban for eternity that made him come down off his high horse. Don't you dare forgive him Harry."

All of them gaped at Hermione who looked around at the faces that stared at her and flushed, "What? I was just saying,"

"You were just saying the perfect thing." Harry told her stepping closer to her and then suddenly pulling her into a tight hug.

"Wow!" Arran grinned when Harry glared a little but he was blushing also and so it was not very effective. "Hermione, we were kinda shocked that you were able to go on for so long without taking a breath. That's all." Arran told her, grinning at her flushed face.

"And we agree with you wholeheartedly. If Harry dares to forgive the old coot after all that he said yesterday and more importantly after what you said just now, well we will throw a shrinking hex at his knickers." Draco told her laughing when Hermione gasped and then blushed furiously as she thought of the implications of such a hex.

"What?" Harry shouted finally getting a hang of where they were planning to hex, "I will show you right now what that is. Ria, hey! Ria," Harry shouted, "Hold Draco, damn it hold him," he yelled and fired off the shrinking hex at him and then there was a merry chase and hexes simply thrown all around.

Some found their mark and the others hit the wall and it was truly fun time for the next half hour before everyone cooled down and went to have their breakfast in different colors, various things sprouting off their faces, ears, arms and chest.

Snape walked into the dining room filled with giggling and laughing boys and girls who were snickering at each other.

"Finished admiring each other? May I reverse it or would you like to stay the way you are." He asked them dryly.

Harry who had his ears changed into huge flat, round fleshy thing that made him look slightly idiotic grinned.

"Sev, we could go like this tonight and frighten the pants of them. What do you say?" he asked.

Snape moved his wand in a sweeping motion and all of them turned to normal though they were much disheveled. "Brilliant idea. Only they probably look more frightening naturally so it is hard to believe they would be scared of tub ears and long nose hair beard." Referring to Draco's nose hair that had until a second ago flown like Dumbledore's beard.

Arran who had become a dwarf and had been standing on the chair until Snape removed the hex, grinned at Snape as he jumped down. "Loosen up man and don't make them tense."

Snape smiled reluctantly and went to sit down by Harry and Remus walked in.

"James told me I had missed something spectacular. Why did you guys change back?"

All of them pointed their hands silently to Snape.

"Aah! The spoil sport." Remus said pleasantly and sat down amidst a lot of snickering especially when Snape turned an irritated face towards Remus.

"Perhaps I can show you all that the children were sporting?" Snape asked him in an equally pleasant voice.

"No, no, no, Severus, I am truly grateful but now-a-days I bar luxuries of that type." Remus replied evenly and then laughed along with the others and Snape rolled his eyes and asked for the parchment from Albus and handed it over to Remus.

"Now read that in a mature way and don't you dare growl." Snape told him sternly.

Remus read it and turned urgently to Harry, "Harry, you are not going to anything foolish like that are you?"

"He wouldn't dare Moony until he wants a shrinking hex on his panties." Arran told him giggling away like a School kid.

"Panties? I don't wear," Harry spluttered as he looked horrified at Hermione who was blushing and snickering into her hands and not looking at him. Remus blinked for a second before he started laughing and slowly everyone settled down to eat except Harry who was glaring daggers at Arran who was not at all impressed having been with the likes of Voldemort who could glare you to death in about a minute, all this while.

“I will get you with the bloody hex if it kills me, just you wait.” Harry muttered in what he hoped was a very frightening voice, but seeing Arran grin back at him and blowing him a kiss of all the bloody things Harry figured he was not very impressive.

Snape looked at all of them with deep happiness in his black eyes. His eyes met Remus’s in perfect understanding as he saw the happiness mirrored in his as well.

The kids had been through so much all alone and sometimes in so much despair and he was so thankful that Harry was here for Arran and the others and also for the Slytherins who had given their oaths the other day. A person like Harry was whom Regulus and he did not have and because they had no one to turn to, Reg was dead and he was literally a slave of two horrible masters for so many years.

Yesterday Harry had demanded an oath from Amelia Bones and that Brian Wheeler for two things; one to never betray them and the other to make sure that they would at all costs see that Arran, Draco and all the other Slytherins would be free to lead their lives. No one had known Harry would ask for an oath for their sakes and Snape had seen Arran brush his eyes with his hands and Ria and Pansy openly crying and Draco and Blaise biting their lips until they bled to stop themselves from howling.

Not only Amelia and her deputy but surprisingly, Shacklebolt, Tonks and all the Weasleys swore they would help as well.

The Daily Prophet arrived as they were finishing their meal and Snape opened it to find a photo of Albus Dumbledore standing in The Leaky Cauldron and talking in a very humble manner.

Dumbledore Admits to Mistakes - Says Harry was Right in Attacking Him above Dumbledore’s photo and

Dumbledore Also Says All Articles very True – Life Debt to Harry True - the Wizarding World is Saved below his photo

There was a lengthy article about all that Dumbledore had talked about yesterday and about the record sales of the Quibbler that was

still going strong and a discussion about the articles that had appeared in the Quibbler the day before.

It seems that Dumbledore has really committed some grave mistakes and he spent the whole evening until today morning trying to kiss and make up with Harry Potter with whom he definitely has fallen out.

The Leaky Cauldron was abuzz the whole of yesterday with the news that had appeared in the Quibbler, a magazine run by the Lovegoods, and The Leaky Cauldron looks to be full of eager wizards discussing the Quibbler and the articles that appeared in them today as well.

Dumbledore was there all of yesterday and admits that the life debt holds well even if the blood was taken forcibly as it was in the case of Harry Potter.

Voldemort cannot kill Harry because of this debt that he owes to this boy, Dumbledore said and he also agreed with Harry's opinion of closing the Wizarding World to the muggleborns by spelling their immediate families. He said he would tackle this problem in the next session of the Wizengamot and try his best to have it passed as law.

Why is Dumbledore so eager to get back with the Boy-who-Lived and what was the fall out in the first place. This journalist would give her left arm to know.

Important points from the conversations below:

By Rita Skeeter

"Well he is really scared isn't he?" Snape commented in surprise and the others were shocked as well.

"That memory really made him piss in his pants. Blackmail is the best." Draco sighed dramatically.

All of them grinned and then they went out to the living room and lounged about talking. It was about lunchtime before the Weasleys and Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler, Shaklebolt, McGonagall and Tonks came.

Once all of them had arrived, Snape called the meeting to order and then Harry and the others put their silliness and jokes away and started going through all the details once again.

At Grimmauld Place

Molly and the other Weasleys flood into Grimmauld Place after their draining meeting with the others. Molly had seen first hand Harry's loyalty to Arran and the others and the way he had demanded they be left alone. She saw them crying and it had touched her and had made her weep as well.

All this would have been Ron and Ginny's too, had they been good friends. But they weren't. Molly had learnt all that had happened from McGonagall and the portraits and had been horrified about how Harry had been alone and how from Hermione and later Snape and McGonagall he had won over all of them here today.

Half this suffering would not have been there, why half all of Harry's suffering would not have been there if only Ron and Ginny had come to Harry and told him everything. Instead they took money and betrayed their friends.

There was no one there in Grimmauld Place and she went to her room with a heavy heart leaning on Arthur who held her very tightly.

Bill peeped into Ron's and Ginny's rooms and found them sleeping very soundly and all of the retired to their own beds.

Molly had been extremely grateful to Harry and the others for allowing the family to deal with Ron and Ginny instead of insisting on their punishing them. That alone had brought her to tears yet again.

Arthur silently gave her a vial of sleeping potion and she smiled at him a bit weakly though and obediently drank it. In five minutes she was asleep. Arthur took a vial himself and was soon sprawled out beside his wife.

The next morning Molly woke up late and all refreshed. Arthur was already up and he and Bill had called in sick and had obtained leave of absence from the ministry for Arthur and from Gringotts for Bill. The Twins had Lee Jordan to take over for today as well.

Arthur was reading the paper in the kitchen and breakfast was already made. She entered the kitchen and the Twins sat her down and bowing all the time, and placed her breakfast in front of her.

No one was talking and the reason was the presence of Ron and Ginny. They had their plates in front of them and had finished with breakfast but not quite daring to leave the room. The other Weasleys had by a common unspoken consent decided to allow their mother to deal with them and so no one had said anything.

Molly ate and she chatted with Arthur about the Daily Prophet's article about Dumbledore.

Once breakfast was over all of them got up and went to the main hall and sat down. Ron and Ginny followed them there and stood in from to them a little defiantly in Ron's case and frightened in Ginny's.

"Tell us what you are going to do with us. Disown us?" Ron asked defiantly, hiding his fear.

Molly looked at them in surprise. "Why should I disown you Ron and Ginny?"

"Then what are you going to do with us?" Ginny asked her lips trembling. "Tell us so that we may be prepared."

"I don't understand what you are saying Ginny. Why should I forgive you and Ron. Both of you have acted true to the Weasley name after all. We are the blood traitors you know." She said conversationally.

All the Weasleys looked up at that and Ron and Ginny gaped. "What? We are not blood traitors." Ron shouted his face red.

"We are not working with You-Know-Who mum." Ginny cried.

"No and I must thank Merlin for that." Molly agreed. "But what you have been doing is just as bad if not more."

"Mum Harry is a walking disaster. He just runs into all kinds of danger without realizing that you could get killed. Sirius died like that, because Harry did not listen to Hermione and stay in the castle." Ron started saying and stopped when he heard the crack of something breaking and found the glass Arthur was holding in his hand shatter.

Ron gulped and he stopped as he saw the fury in his father's eyes.

"So if he is a walking disaster you take money from Dumbledore and spy on Harry do you Ron, instead of talking to him and telling him where he has gone wrong." Molly asked him in an even tone.

"No mum it was not like that." Ron protested flushing with fear and looking at his father who still had to say a word.

"For how long have you been taking the money and how much each year?" Molly asked him and for the first time since they started talking there was a harsh tone and warning in her voice.

Ron gulped, "Since third year and Ginny since her second, and ten thousand each every year." Molly drew a quick breath and the others gasped.

"And the *imperios*? You seem to have all the answers for everything so would you tell us about that also?" Molly asked him her eyes flashing now.

Ron was wisely silent and Ginny had not spoken at all.

Bill stretched and Charlie stood up. "Mum I think we are wasting our time with these idiots and wannabe criminals."

"Hey! Mind your words. We are not criminals." Ron shouted.

"What is the punishment in the Wizarding World for casting an *imperio* Ron?" Arthur asked him icily, speaking for the first time.

"Dad, you get life in Azkaban." Bill answered with a bitter smile.

“That is where you would be if it weren’t for Harry’s kindness in not prosecuting you. Had he done so, with the evidence he has and he told us under oath and since he is still living, I am assuming the same oath given in the Wizengamot would get you both life in Azkaban. But you know what Ron, you and your sister are too big for the likes of us poor Weasleys.

“We have only things like loyalty, integrity and honesty and an ability to stand by ours no matter what. While I will not disown you because that would be harsh on your brothers who share the same name and have committed no sin, I refuse to have anything to do with either of you. I will clothe you, feed you, if you want my help in that of course but otherwise I refuse to have to do anything with the three of you.”

Arthur got up after he had spoken in a cold tone one would not have thought it possible for Arthur to even know how to speak so coldly and went up to his room. The rest of the family left the moment Arthur had stood up. Molly looked to them once very sadly before she turned to follow her husband.

“You had the best family, the best friends and the best opportunity to make your mark in life.” she laughed bitterly, “I wonder when you will realize that you have lost all this. That Ron and Ginny, is the day you would have truly began to repent, then and only then is there any kind of hope for both of you.”

She Ron and Ginny who stood there in silence only one thought going round and round their heads; they had lost and had lost big.

End of Chapter – 31

Chapter – 32

It was the night of August the first. Harry and everyone who were with him were assembled at Godric's Hollow. Snape had made earrings for everyone and also the portkeys that would automatically bring them to Godric's Hollow in case of severe injury.

Mrs. Longbottom had also asked three of her elves to come to Godric's Hollow and was busy teaching them and Dobby and Winky the various healing potions and was labeling them by writing all kinds of information on them and instructing the elves to use it on anyone who would come injured to Godric's Hollow.

Harry was restlessly pacing the floor and then falling on the sofa and then getting up once again to pace the room. All the others were in a state of high alert and real tension. Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler had each and every auror in Britain ready to attack. Only they did not know where exactly they would be asked to go and whom they would confront. They too were huddled in groups in the Ministry and were discussing their modes of offense.

Amelia Bones had not allowed anyone to leave and had questioned all of them under veritaserum and had ascertained their willingness to go out and hunt the death eaters down.

Rookwood, McNair and Avery were placed in solitary cells and Amelia Bones had gone straight to the Ministry with her deputy after the meeting at Godric's Hollow.

Brian Wheeler who was with her was invisible and they had gone into each of the three cells and had questioned loud and long under veritaserum and the veritas spell combined.

Amelia Bones after all the show of asking many questions had asked the single most important one. That question she had asked them before she had allowed Brian Wheeler to give the potion.

“Are you sympathetic to Lord Voldemort and his cause of killing muggles, muggleborns and half bloods indiscriminately?”

“Yes.”

That was all and Amelia Bones nodded to her deputy to administer the potion and Brian silently cast the *imperio* at them and fed them a potion Snape had given that would kill them within a week undetected. The *imperio* made them take the potion without complaint or questions.

That job well done, they had gone to their homes for a well deserved rest and were at Godric's Hollow the next day after lunch. They had been to the Ministry in the morning and had made plans for attacks.

Amelia Bones had called all the aurors, including Tonks and Shacklebolt, early in the morning.

“I have received a lot of information about many death eaters from the six prisoners we have captured yesterday. We will move against all of them tonight. Please be ready and remember no unforgivables and no harming their children. Otherwise they are your to fight and capture and to kill only in self – defense.

“I will give you the details in the evening and you need to leave by midnight. Simply crash the wards and attack. If they try to escape bring down their homes and then declare them to be killed on sight.” She finished and looked around at everyone.

All of them nodded as one. Satisfied Amelia Bones left for Godric's Hollow along with Brian Wheeler.

Harry had written to all the Slytherins and Boot and had asked them to meet him outside Hogsmeade near the Caves where he had seen Sirius in his fourth year.

All of them were there slightly scared and eager to know why Harry had called them.

Harry came first and greeted them and placed silencing and anti – apparition spells and in two minutes Amelia Bones, Brian Wheeler, Snape, Arran, Draco and Shacklebolt came.

“Wait!” Harry shouted to the Slytherins who were preparing to run away, when they realized they could not apparate.

Nott turned to look at Harry with an expression of anger and betrayal on his face.

“Today we are planning an attack on all the Inner and Outer Circle members.” Harry began abruptly and all the Slytherins stopped running and whirled around and gaped at him.

Harry nodded. “Yes today we have decided to attack and kill all the Inner Circle and a few Outer Circle members and also anyone who fights back with intention to kill. All of you cannot escape and run away because Voldemort will be suspicious so I have brought Draco, Snape and Arran who is with us and who knows you and Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler and Shacklebolt who are aurors and who don’t know you but need to see all of you so that you are not prosecuted.”

Harry turned to Amelia Bones and smiled. “These are the Slytherins and Boot is the Ravenclaw who have given their oaths and they want out of this war. They have been marked but Madam Bones please assure them that they will never be captured and imprisoned today and if they are by your aurors you will release them before tomorrow morning.”

The Slytherins stared unbelievably at Harry and shook with relief and Nott actually gripped Harry’s hands.

“Thanks I thought for a moment you were going to turn us in.” he whispered, taken aback that Harry was willing to go to such an extent to save them.

Harry smiled at him and Amelia Bones spoke to them, “I will not be with my aurors and apart from us no one knows about you and your loyalties. It is not safe you will agree.” The Slytherins nodded.

“So move away to a place where Harry will tell you in a moment. If by chance you are captured and shouted at for being a death eater and even given veritaserum that confirms it, do not worry. I will free you the moment I come into the Ministry.”

All of them nodded terrified.

"Today all the death eaters are worried about the Quibbler articles. This is the right time, you understand?" Amelia Bones spoke kindly to them.

"Nott we will not be coming to your home or to Boot's. This is for the rest." Harry told him with a smile.

Gavin spoke up, "If you tell us when you will come, I will open the wards to your people. Only my father is a death eater. Please leave my mother and my younger brother and sister." He requested.

One by one all of them told Amelia Bones who the death eater in the family was and finally Harry handed over the portkeys and also gave them the secret to the vacant shop in Diagon Alley that they had applied the Fidelus on for today.

"All of you activate this portkey and think of shop no.102 and you will be safe. I will meet you there tomorrow. If by any chance all of us here do not survive, I still have told the goblins about you and they will come there tomorrow and help you. But that will not happen and we all will meet." Harry told a stunned set of Slytherins and was awarded with a hug from Millicent Bulstrode who was crying.

"May Merlin himself come with all of you and help you to win this war. We will meet Harry Potter and all of us will pray for that."

"Yes!" the others shouted and on that note they left.

Harry and the rest went back to Godric's Hollow and began getting ready for the last but one stage in the war.

That night all of them hugged each other and Harry, Snape and Bill went to the Lestrangle Home, Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler to the impressive Malfoy Manor.

The three had Remus as back up and but Amelia Bones and Arran had no one. They had not wanted one. All the others had back up incase they were injured and had to flee; so that the death eaters would not escape and the back ups would continue the fight.

Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler were popped in by Dobby who took them one at a time and left them there. They crept to the main doors and Brian just swerved to avoid the killing curse that rushed from the window above, which he had detected only seconds before it would have killed him. Amelia Bones at the same time shattered the window from where the curse came and Brian as he was getting up smashed the door away.

Both of them ran to the doorway to find Lucius Malfoy and his wife already casting curses on them. Brian rolled away but Amelia Bones got caught in a crucio from Narcissa.

Brian hit her with a stunner as he rolled away yet again from a killing curse and then conjured a powerful shield just in time to block an orange color Black magic curse from Malfoy. Amelia Bones gingerly got to her feet and removed one vial of the potion and swallowed it and looked straight at Malfoy who was busy fighting with Brian and throwing killing curses left right and center and said, "*Avada Kedavra.*"

Lucius Malfoy died with a look of total surprise and shock on his face. Brian stunned the already unconscious Narcissa once again and they walked inside. They placed a portkey on Lucius and activated it to land in Amelia Bones's office. Then they tied up Narcissa and enervated her.

Before she could get her bearings right, Amelia Bones poured six drops of veritaserum and Brian hit her with the veritas spell.

"Are you a death eater?" Amelia Bones asked her the first question, the moment her eyes glazed over.

"No." Narcissa replied quietly.

"Are you sympathetic to You-Know-Who's cause?"

Narcissa visibly struggled with the veritaserum and a minute later with sweat in her brow and blood slightly trickling down her nostrils, "No." she replied now resigned to her torture and death by her husband and Voldemort and her sister.

"Thank you Mrs. Malfoy." Amelia Bones said quietly and poured the anti-dote and removed the spell.

Narcissa wiped the blood and looked terrified at Amelia Bones, "He will kill me and then Draco will suffer."

"No he won't. I am sorry Mrs. Malfoy; your husband is no more."

Narcissa Malfoy stared at Amelia Bones for a long minute and then she slowly turned to look around for the body of Lucius Malfoy. Amelia Bones told her she had it sent to the Ministry.

"I would advise you to stop the floo and also the wards except for Draco. He will be along as soon as he can and tell you everything." Narcissa's eyes widened at the implications of that statement and Amelia Bones waited for Narcissa to reset the wards and close the floo except for Draco.

"Please wait for Draco to arrive Mrs. Malfoy. As long as you keep up to your statement of being against You-Know-Who, there really should be no trouble either for you or for Draco. *Ever*. As I told you we have sent Mr. Malfoy's body to the Ministry and I doubt you will receive it for a proper burial."

Amelia still shaky took a vial of the pepper up after her one sided conversation with Narcissa who simply stood there and went to her office along with Brian to see who would be there with the minor death eaters walking behind them.

They had been remarkably successful and she knew it was pure luck that Brian was not killed. They sat in tense silence as they waited for news, the important news of those who had gone on the one off assignment. That was what would clinch everything in their favor.

Amelia Bones was surprised that she really did not feel for killing Lucius Malfoy. He had been responsible for almost buying Fudge outright and keeping the Wizarding World in a state of constant confusion and chaos. The Ministry would be a better place for Malfoy, McNair, Avery and Rookwood not working there anymore.

If only she could deal with Fudge, then it would be even better.

Half an hour later she sent a message to Godric's Hollow saying she was successful and Narcissa seemed alright but would need more questioning.

Arran went off by himself to Alecto's Manor and found him in his library reading.

"Arran! What a pleasant surprise. The Dark Lord set us all at lunch time to our homes to ask us to work hard for the articles. I am going mad, let me tell you."

Arran grinned, though his eyes were serious as he perched on the table.

"I am sorry to come in uninvited Alecto, but I was wondering if I could borrow your family book on the mind magic. I am researching the link and I am at my wit's end."

"Sure." Alecto brought him the book and Arran was also perusing and collection a few other books.

Suddenly, Arran flicked his arm at point blank range and Alecto slumped. Arran tied him up and chanted softly and long and then enervated him.

"Arran?" he asked confused and doubtful.

"I could have killed you from behind and then gone away but I wanted to explain why."

"Why?"

"Simple. I am a traitor to the Dark Lord's cause. *Senthalimacaariinathisaere*."

Alecto died on the spot only his body started erupting in cuts and bruises. Arran removed all traces of him and his magic and left with hardly a sound.

He went to Godric's Hollow and found Draco hurt very badly and Ria weeping as she tended to him. Arran jumped in and flicked his wand and found traces of a heavy clotting spell and placed him under a stasis charm. This would need the potions of Snape.

"What happened?" Arran asked Pansy softly. She was weeping too and Blaise was sleeping with a bandage around his head.

Arran flicked his wand and found him in a healing sleep.

"Mrs. Zabini set the inferi she had at her home at us. It was terrifying Arran. Draco and I lost it for a few seconds and she got that curse when Draco was fighting the inferi. I killed her and we escaped with the portkey and the inferi chasing after us." Pansy shuddered.

"He will be alright. Only he needs potions and Snape is the best for that. We will wait for him." Arran comforted her as best as she could and trying his best not to worry himself.

At that moment he received a message that Lucius was dead and Narcissa was okay but would need questioning.

He breathed a sigh of relief and waited with his fingers crossed and feeling very bitter about his parents and their priorities and hoped nothing would happen to those three and their back up Remus.

McGonagall, Tonks, the Weasleys, Shacklebolt, Neville, Hermione and Mrs. Longbottom were busy attacking and fighting all the death eaters in the outer ranks. Slowly the shop no.102 filled up with frightened Slytherins and they huddled up to one another and waited for Harry to come and rescue them.

McGonagall gate crashed the Crabbe's home and she and Neville with Luna as their back up finished off both Crabbe Sr. and his wife who kept trying to hit Neville with the killing curse.

McGonagall fired a killing curse for the first time in her life at her and Neville at the same time accioed a huge table and banished it at Crabbe Sr. He died when a piece of the marble table hit his head and cracked his skull open.

They left and apparated back to Godric's Hollow and joined the others who were already there.

Mrs. Longbottom, Molly and Hermione went to the Goyle Home and Mrs. Longbottom crashed the wards and Goyle Sr. came running along with his wife. Goyle took his small sister and portkeyed to shop no. 102 at the same time.

Hermione and Molly fought with Mrs. Goyle and Mrs. Longbottom ran and rolled with the best of them as she fought a surprisingly agile Goyle Sr. As they were throwing curses, Mrs. Longbottom suddenly took out another wand from her robes and holding it in her left hand shouted, "*Avada Kedavra*." And that was the end of Goyle Sr.

Mrs. Goyle shrieked when she saw her husband fall and Molly stunned her.

Hermione repeated the same question Amelia Bones had asked Narcissa, only Mrs. Goyle said, "I am very much a death eater and proud to be one."

Hermione did not ask another question more. She gave her the antidote stunned her twice, tied a portkey and sent her straight to the special cell Amelia Bones had prepared for all death eaters who would be captured.

They apparated to Godric's Hollow and slumped on the sofa and learned about all that had happened.

The Weasleys men had divided into two and the Twins went off to attack the Bulstrodes and Arthur and Charlie went to the Greengrass home. Tonks and Shacklebolt to the Davies home.

The fact that all the Slytherins opened up the wards and no one was expecting the whole auror force to attack and that many of them were not hesitant in using the killing curse shocked all the death eaters and allowed all the Inner and Outer Circle members to be captured and killed. The rest were taken into custody and Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler started the veritaserum questioning on the spot.

Without the Minister's knowledge they had accomplished an almost rout of Voldemort's forces, only because of Snape, Arran and the Slytherins who wanted out Amelia Bones realized. But she also thought rather ruefully they could help only because Harry had helped them first and he had believed them. She knew had they come to her, she would have imprisoned them and then asked questions that would have only made them desperate to escape and not cooperate.

Harry, Snape and Bill went to the Lestrange Manor along with Remus who was their backup. They apparated almost silently and went around the wards a couple of times. Arran had told them about all the details pertaining to the wards and once they completed flying around the property twice, Snape, Harry and Bill started chanting.

Snape chanted in the ancient language while Harry and Bill stated pouring a bit of their blood on their wand hand and holding the wand on their blood, chanted the counters to the blood wards.

Along with Snape's magic, they brought down the truly impressive wards, probably even better than Malfoy Manor Harry thought as they chanted and crashed them in about ten minutes.

They crept inside and Snape sent his magic to see if there were magic lines to sense intruders, but there was nothing.

They were nearing the house when there was a huge blast that threw all of them backwards and away from each other. They had been spotted.

Harry picked himself up and swerved to avoid a bright orange curse that would have turned his insides out and his outsides in. The curse hit the tree behind him and the tree blew into smithereens. Harry quickly conjured a block of stone and a lot of snakes and sent his conjured snakes to bite to death anyone except the Harry and the other three.

In the minute it took for Harry to hiss the instructions to the snakes, the stone he had conjured were smashed into smithereens by the killing curse that was hurled at them.

Harry had not time to look at Snape and the others and just in time he noticed a spell coming from the side. He quickly deflected it and sent a revealer. Shit! Was the thought that ran onto his mind. It was Fenrir Greyback and he came running, transformed and huge.

Harry cast a killing curse and Fenrir jumped out of the curse's way and took a mighty leap and fell on Harry who rolled away, but his left hand was caught and Fenrir fell on his palm and the bones were crushed. Harry felt the bones of his left hand break and it took all his power not to faint with the pain he was experiencing. He wavered for a minute and then Harry was struggling to push Fenrir off completely terrified when the huge werewolf rolled over him and opened his mouth and howled terrifyingly.

Harry could not even shiver in fear because Fenrir had pressed him down, and his stench and his strength and the pain in his left hand was getting to Harry. For a few seconds Harry could hardly breathe; he realized he was going to die in a few minutes and he thought desperately of Sirius and his parents and Snape; then suddenly strength came to him.

He loosened up inside and then concentrated his magic inside him, just as Fenrir was lifting his head and opening his mouth to bite him on his face to chew him to death, Harry acted.

The magic Harry released threw Fenrir so far away, blasting him in the process. Harry hurriedly conjured a huge stone and cried, 'Accio Fenrir' and a few seconds later Fenrir crashed into the huge stone boulder and another 'diffindo' his already shapeless and bloody head was cut off from his body.

Harry cast a powerful shield around him and hurriedly took a pain reliever from his potions belt and gulped it; cast a numbing charm on his now swollen left hand down and ran towards the house. His left hand was throbbing and the pain reliever potion and the numbing charm helped it to come down to a dull ache.

He saw Remus battling both the elder Lestranges and cast a killing curse at one of them and watched as Remus jumped away from another curse that broke his shield and cast the cutting curse at the remaining older Lestrangle. The head was severed from the body and

he turned only to be pulled back as a killing curse ripped almost through his right ear.

He whirled around and started firing curses at Bellatrix who had rushed at them with a scream from where she and Rudolphus were attacking Snape and Bill. She gave curse for curse and was effortlessly fighting him and Remus *and* pushing them back. Her curses were spot on and very powerful; where she gathered the power after thirteen years in Azkaban Harry did not know as he flew out of the way of one of them, one that would have removed all bones in his body he thought with a shudder as he recognized that curse.

They went on for almost half an hour jumping and swerving, all of them and Bellatrix jumped and swerved with the best of them, trading insults all the while. Bill and Snape were furiously fighting Rudolphus Lestrange. In a combat like this ancient magic could not be used unless you were very proficient wandlessly because in the time it would take you to chant and lock the magic in, you could get killed. So they were fighting a wizard's battle and they were equal to each other.

Bellatrix had screamed initially when she had seen Snape and had taunted him horribly, "You greasy, dirty, half blood traitor!" she had screeched. "I will kill you if it is the last thing I do. You will go the same way Regulus did."

Snape's lips thinned and answered with a killing curse and Bellatrix had cackled horribly, "Poor Sevvie, missed your partner did you now? Do not worry. I will send you to him."

Snape threw a cutting curse that missed her and slit her robes and made her scream with anger and fury and then the fight started in earnest with Rudolphus coming into the fray and Snape and Bill had battled Bellatrix and Rudolphus.

Now, Rudolphus was fighting as well as Bellatrix and it was Bill who fell next with a slash of a bright blue curse that hit him on the chest and a second later he disappeared to Godric's Hollow. A fraction of a second later a killing curse hit the spot where Bill was and the next second Rudolphus died with the killing curse that hit him on his chest.

Snape turned to where a furious battle was taking place between Harry and Bellatrix.

Harry had screamed for Remus to keep out of it and a second later it was not necessary because a silver javelin tore his stomach apart. A second later Remus vanished, blood pouring out of his stomach.

"Watch it Potter," laughed Bellatrix insanely, "I will send you to a nice reunion with that blood traitor Sirius and your mudblood mother and a fool of a father." She jumped, "*Avada kedavra.*"

"I will send you there first so that both Sirius and Regulus can give you all that you need in great quantities, like your sanity for example." Harry shouted as he rolled away and sent his own dark curse, she screamed and cursed back.

"Sangunisto!"

"Ramanpitira!"

"Alwoausu!"

Neriaudui!"

"Saamapisssasssa!" Harry hissed and a huge basilisk came out of his wand and Bellatrix died on the spot as she unknowingly looked into its eyes, trying to banish it. Harry at once flicked his wand and vanished the great beast that looked just like the basilisk in the Chamber, before it could turn around.

Harry gave his wand to Snape who frowned as he saw Harry use his right hand to remove the portkey and looked at his left hand. It was bulging and blood seeping and dropping down.

He grabbed the portkey from Harry and placed it on Bellatrix and summoning the other Lestranges and sent them away and rebuilt the wards so that no one could enter before Arran did. He used the blood of Harry to create blood wards and also sealed it with ancient magic and took Harry's hand and apparated.

Snape and Harry were the last to enter Godric's Hollow and an immensely anxious Arran and indeed all the others ran to them. Snape pushed everyone away, shouting Harry was injured and he did what Harry had done a year ago. He simply removed the bones of his left hand and fed him with a skelegrow and a pepper up potion and ran to see the other casualties.

Harry ran behind Snape to the basement where they had a temporary infirmary and saw Draco and Remus who was the worst injured along with Bill, all of them under a stasis charm.

Arran came behind Harry and whirled him around and checked him thoroughly.

"Are you okay and Severus?" his eyes that were full of despair asked the question his lips didn't. Were his parents dead?

"Fine. How about all of you?" Harry nodded once and Arran turned away to hide his emotions of his parents who were willing to die for Voldemort but refusing to live for him and Ria. At that time Snape simply screamed.

"Pansy! Arran! Come here and start chopping. Where is Hermione?" he hollered simultaneously setting up cauldrons. Arran, Pansy and Hermione ran to him and started chopping the ingredients as Snape shouted instructions.

Harry and the others stepped back and Harry asked all of them to go upstairs and relax. They would not be able to do anything until the potions were finished.

All of them reluctantly went up and Harry activated his earring.

"Hello Madam Bones?"

"Mmm. Please attend to this at once. I will call for you in a minute alright?" Harry heard her saying to someone and his answer.

"Yes Madam Bones."

“Harry?” her voice sounded anxious. “How are all of you and are all of you successful?”

Harry told her briefly and added that only Bill, Draco and Remus were really injured and Snape was seeing to them by brewing the necessary potions.

“How many are dead Madam Bones and is Mr. Wheeler fine?”

Amelia Bones told him what had happened at Malfoy Manor and then she told Harry about the incredible success of their attacks.

All the Inner and Outer Circle death eaters were dead as well as many other death eaters who died in the fight and who were killed purely in self defense.

They had not lost a single auror and Voldemort was totally alone and without any of his trusted death eaters. What a blow!

Snape worked all night and well into the morning and finally had the potions ready.

Early next morning, a very tired Snape, Arran, Hermione and Pansy carefully placed the special potions in big bottles and Snape and Arran removed the stasis charm on Draco and Remus respectively.

Blood started gushing from their wounds and Arran and Snape started the healing. They chanted in their ancient tongue and at the same time administered the potions and watched with relief when Draco and Remus went into a healing coma. Then Snape turned and did the same with Bill and checked all of them and breathed a huge sigh of relief when his wand showed they were in a healing coma.

Molly Weasley had almost sobbed with relief. She had been terrified she would lose one more child, this time to the war and she had fainted in her husband’s arm after seeing that Bill was in a healing coma.

It was creeping towards dawn and Harry took a couple of pepper up and healing potion and after Snape administered a numbing charm on his hand that was bandaged; apparated out of Godric's Hollow

along with the Weasleys except Molly. Hermione, and Mrs. Longbottom and Neville also apparated with Harry.

Before Harry apparated he spoke softly to Snape who smiled exhaustedly at him and nodded and Harry hugged him and Harry, Snape and Arran discussed softly along with Arthur Weasley and then all of them apparated. Luna floo called Mr. Lovegood and after he came they discussed a bit and Mr. Lovegood nodded and left.

Arran started preparing the questions and answers to publish in the late morning edition of the Quibbler and all of them took their pepper ups and other healing potions. They could not sleep; not just yet.

End of Chapter – 32

Chapter – 33

The Quibbler had new news along with the old news that had taken the whole Wizarding World by storm. The new news would make the collective Wizarding World stop its breath and look at each other in shock, astonishment and wonder and hope.

Harry, Hermione, Mrs. Longbottom, Neville and the Weasleys except Molly Weasley who had opted to stay with Bill apparated to the Ministry of Magic and walked through its deserted Atrium. Harry glanced at the statue of the wizard, the goblin and the centaur, and was plunged into memories of two years ago when he had come to save Sirius.

He shook his head to clear it and walked along to the Head Auror's Office.

Fudge had woken up normally the day before; on the 31st of July when the Wizarding World erupted because of the articles in the Quibbler. He was not among the fortunate few to get the copies free and he had a very eventless morning and at he went to the Ministry of Magic at the usual time.

Things were very nice for Fudge and he was smiling a lot these days. There was no visible trouble from Albus Dumbledore and Lucius Malfoy had him under a nice complacent charm that made him shake his head in sympathy at the lives lost in the muggle world; but that was hardly his problem.

The witches and wizards that had died in the Wizarding World were unfortunate casualties according to Malfoy and so it was according to Fudge as well. Anyway there were those six death eaters captured so the Ministry of Magic was doing something positive to contain the death eaters and You-Know-Who.

He went to his room sipped a nice cup of tea, signed a few papers for meaningless rules and regulations that would be totally worthless and looked around importantly.

It was an hour later that his world came crashing down his ears when his frantic and panic stricken secretary came running into his office without asking for permission. Fudge was about to put her down with a few phrases he had 'borrowed' from Malfoy when he noticed the panic on her face. She was holding a paper in her trembling hands.

"Well what is it?" he asked in irritation and just a touch of fear.

She had not answered but instead had placed the paper on his desk and had gone out before he could ask her what the hell was wrong with her. He looked down and caught the name and a sneer came on to his face before he read the headlines.

He fainted. He apparently had much in common with Lucius Malfoy his good friend and Albus Dumbledore of whom he was very jealous.

Unfortunately there was no one to revive him and Fudge woke up from the floor where he had slumped down. He got up shakily and looked at the Quibbler once again and started to read. It took him another read to fully understand everything that was written in that paper and he squawked in dismay. Lucius Malfoy was a death eater and the blasted Potter boy dared him to walk with the sleeves on his left arm rolled up?

He took a pinch of floo and said the special password that Lucius Malfoy had given him to access a bare room in the Malfoy Manor, where an elf would come and take his request to talk to Malfoy and a few minutes later Malfoy would come striding in and take care of whatever it was that would trouble him and even give him ideas to get rid of his problems.

To day there was no elf and he shouted and screamed but nothing. The floo did not admit anyone to go through unfortunately for Fudge and he glared helplessly at the bare room and pulled out his head very scared.

People were already calling for his blood because he had failed to recognize the return of Voldemort for a whole year. Now with this -- he shook with sheer terror; he could even get a berth in Azkaban for being friendly with Malfoy, whom he had released from Azkaban and had insisted at the time that he was innocent. Fudge was so scared about himself he did not realize the seriousness of the other articles.

He wrote a letter and placed it on his table saying he was very sick and put a pinch of floo powder into the fire and flood home. He blocked the floo network and also changed his wards with trembling hands and then sat down shouting to his elf for something strong to drink and finally relaxed.

That was when he went through the articles with a better frame of mind and was shocked at the articles that were written. He trembled at the chaos You-Know-Who would cause after reading this and was itching to go back to his office and hand out an arrest warrant to one Harry bloody Potter but he did not want to step out until he was able to get in touch with Malfoy and be assured personally of his innocence and see for himself his bare forearm.

With Fudge out of the way Amelia Bones had no problem to get her work done. There was so much chaos at the Ministry and after lunch the Ministry of Magic had only 15 of its strength. It was only people like Percy Weasley and Umbridge who stayed back to see the Minister and snoop around the captured death eaters. But Fudge was not there as he was unwell the note on his table said. He was also not accessible by floo as he seemed to have blocked his floo network.

All the rest were at The Leaky Cauldron and in the evening almost all the employees were there listening dumbfounded to Dumbledore's explanations.

No one had seen Dumbledore so humble or so eager to portray him on the side of one Harry Potter who suddenly knew all the answers. All of them were baffled and utterly perplexed because they did not recognize this Dumbledore.

No one came to Fudge all through that day and night a fact that made him more perplexed and relieved alternatively. He waited for that day

to pass in utter solitude and almost sitting by the fire and poking his head through it every five minutes.

But it was as if that was not the Malfoy Manor and Lucius Malfoy nor the elf ever came. So Fudge too never ventured out.

He stayed holed up all day and read The Daily Prophet the next day with dismay. He learned all the articles in the Quibbler were true and snarled with desperation and terror. No one had come until now and he found that he couldn't stop sweating. Fudge stayed indoors all day totally inaccessible to all. The next morning Fudge asked the elf to buy the Quibbler and took it from the elf with trembling hands.

On the front page there were only headlines. Blazed across were the words

Almost all Death Eaters Apprehended by Harry Potter, his Friends and the Aurors – Harry Potter exclusive interview

Beneath was written

Voldemort all Alone says Harry Potter

In the center were the words that were in block letters and took up the bottom half of the page and almost gave Fudge a heart attack.

HARRY POTTER CHALLENGES VOLDEMORT TO A WIZARD'S DUEL IN THE QUIDDITCH PITCH AT THE HOWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY ON THE THIRD OF AUGUST AT 5.00 P.M

Fudge stared at the Quibbler in shock.

He turned the page and looked at the interview that was apparently between Harry Potter and Mr. Lovegood.

LG – Thank you Mr. Potter for agreeing to see me and talk to me about well everything that has been going on in the Wizarding World in the last two days that has turned it on its head.

HP (smiles) – Thank you Mr. Lovegood for the articles yesterday. Yes, the Wizarding World has been turned on its head no doubt, but well what else do you expect. These are not only my views but areas where we have to sit up and take notice.

LG – So are you saying that Voldemort is a sham?

HP (nodding in agreement) – Of course Mr. Lovegood. He is not even a wizard anymore. He spent thirteen years as a spirit and then when he came back he had to depend on three others. The rules of magic say that we owe life debts when we are saved by others in a life threatening situation. Voldemort came back to life with my blood. I will not take Mr. Riddle Sr.'s name or Pettigrew's. They are both dead without the knowledge of a life debt. But Voldemort does have a life debt with both Pettigrew and his father, though I do not know how he will repay that; and he has one most definitely with me.

Voldemort is very silly and as I have said before, extremely evil. He says he is for the purebloods, but if you will see, it is from the time he came on the scene that the purebloods began to disappear. I really do not know but I do feel this tells us something.

LG – You were attacking all last night?

HP – Yes. We were and we were very successful. We got an awful lot of information from the six arrested death eaters in the Ministry of magic and on questioning them extensively, we even got memories that show us the faces of the death eaters in the Inner and Outer circles and also the others. Based on that we attacked and captured a great many of them, in fact I would say almost all of them.

The Auror Head Madam Bones and her deputy Brian Wheeler have been most helpful in arranging for questioning without any fuss whatsoever and based on the information given by Rookwood, McNair and Avery who are apparently in the Inner Circle and Outer Circle and the three other junior death eaters who have told us that Voldemort has ordered daily attacks – random attacks to kill as many people as they could every night.

LG – Are all of them captured alive?

HP – Most of them were. But sometimes we had to blast our way and the blasting and the cutting curses sometimes killed them before they were portkeyed to the Ministry of Magic.

LG – Can you name a few who are dead or captured?

HP – Lucius Malfoy, Bellatrix Lestrange, her husband Rudolphus, Alecto, Mrs. Zabini - she was in charge of creating the inferi, Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Crabbe Sr., Mr. Goyle Sr., Mr. Bulstrode and Fenrir Greyback were some of them who were killed while in duel. The others were captured and are currently in the holding cells in the Ministry of Magic to be interrogated and imprisoned.

LG – How about the children of these death eaters?

HP – As far as I know no one among them is marked. All the children of the death eaters and in some cases, their wives as well were very cooperative and showed us the clean forearms and hinted they had no choice except to listen to their husbands and by extension to Voldemort. Madam Bones has assured me that she would allow me along with her for the exhaustive questioning of the death eaters who were captured as well as the families of the death eaters and only then will we be able to discuss their involvement and subsequently their punishment.

LG – What is this about a duel you were talking as I entered your home to interview you?

HP (Smiles) – Yes, why should the Wizarding World suffer because one man is insane and his priority as all the captured death eaters have said was to somehow get hold of Harry Potter and kill him and in the intervening gap was to kill as many muggles and magical people as he can. So I have decided to challenge him to a duel.

LG – Do you really, honestly think Voldemort will listen to you and come for the duel?

HP – Yes I hope he will, but remember that Voldemort will have to accept that challenge as an oath on his magic and blood. I call upon it in fact. I have sent an owl to him stating so. If he gives an oath on his magic he will have to come and fight. Else he is a coward on top of all the other things that he is; that is if he does not answer my missive.

LG – Well this is most astounding! May the Great Gods bless you and wish you all the very best Harry Potter. May you win.

Harry Potter has once again taken the entire mantle upon his young shoulders and has planned and captured almost all the death eaters alive or dead in the space of one day; what the inefficient Ministry of Magic and the Minister Fudge were not able to for two years.

He has not stopped there and he has challenged Voldemort to a duel so that we the worthless Wizarding World who called him an attention seeking insane idiot may be saved.

I for one think Fudge should be publicly hung for all the atrocities he has committed as Minister for magic. He has released Lucius Malfoy from prison and has always failed the Boy-who-Lived; the boy who lost everything but is still there fighting for all our sakes.

This editor hopes the entire Wizarding World is there at Hogwarts tomorrow to cheer for Harry Potter and to spend today praying he may win.

Fudge read the whole interview with dismay. That was that – his career was over. Finished. He had not been approached all of yesterday and today morning no one had still called for him.

He looked thoughtful for a long time. Then he called his elves and told them to pack everything as soon as possible. He sent his head elf and asked it to go to Gringotts and pack everything there from his vaults.

This confusion was the only chance he had. In half an hour Fudge was ready. He asked his elves to change all his money into muggle currency and broke his wand.

He apparated from there and went to the Guernsey Islands and bought a small home in the muggle area and settled down there, never to be heard of after. He colored his hair Black instead of the mousey brown and shaved off his moustache.

He stopped buying the wizarding newspapers; in fact he stopped anything wizarding and he had chosen this island as he remembered this was one of the smaller islands that had no magical community. Breaking his wand for fear of discovery made him inaccessible to his magic that broke him completely as he was not proficient in wandless magic.

He did not know that even as he was leaving, he was voted out of office, declared suspicious of moving with death eaters and had been ordered to be brought in for questioning by the new Minister for magic who had already taken his oath.

Slowly he forgot his magic. He had told his elves to seek employment elsewhere before he had left his home and had awarded those, clothes. Now Fudge was a bitter old man who could not access his magic and lived as a muggle for the rest of his life. He did not live up to a ripe old age as wizards do but died early due to a broken heart because of the lack of magic in his life; it never quite filled the ache in his heart.

Harry walked into a Ministry that was deserted and went to the office of Amelia Bones. She was sitting there with Brian Wheeler and both of them rose to greet Harry with a relieved smile.

“How are you Mr. Potter? And the rest? Are they all safe?” she asked him.

Harry nodded and told her once again briefly what had happened.

“Now that Fenrir is gone we have real hope for the werewolves.” Harry finished with a brief mention of his attack on the Lestrange Manor that had revealed Fenrir there as well.

Amelia Bones nodded in relief; she had seen the bodies after all; and noted the tiredness and the bandaged hand and motioned him to sit down and in turn asked for hot tea told him what had happened to them at Malfoy Manor, “It is like Arran said. Narcissa denied being a death eater under both six drops of veritaserum and the veritas spell. I told her to ward the house and stay there denying access to anyone else except Draco, who would come along and explain.”

“Good.” Harry told her thinking of Draco. He saw the way Arran had turned away after Harry had nodded his head only once. He knew his parents and grandparents were dead, killed. He and Ria were orphans now and while Harry knew that Arran realized his parents were the epitome of evil, to him they were his parents after all and he must be having in a very deep corner of his heart some feeling for them.

“The first thing to do Madam Bones is to remove Fudge from his post. Can you call for an emergency session of the Wizengamot and say I, Harry Potter had requested it?”

“Have already done that Mr. Potter.”

Harry smiled, “Call me Harry please.” Amelia Bones smiled back at him.

“Harry, the Wizengamot will be meeting at sharp ten in the morning. The late morning edition of the Quibbler will be released by eight. That gives a whole two hours for everyone to read the paper and gasp out aloud. After that whatever we do in there will be easy and Dumbledore will not seek to contradict us.”

They went to the Wizengamot promptly at ten and found the whole of the Ministry was there clutching the Quibbler in their hands. There was not an inch of space to be seen.

Dumbledore was there looking very hopefully at Harry who did not even look at him. Dumbledore bit his lips in disappointment. Harry

stayed at the back along with the Weasleys and Mrs. Longbottom and Dumbledore did not quite dare to go near the Weasleys.

Amelia Bones came along with Harry and the others from a room at the back and she took her place at the Head of the Wizengamot and banged her hammer.

There was an immediate silence and slowly Dumbledore stood up and looked around the room solemnly.

“All of us are gathered here to take some serious decisions in the Wizarding World. I give now the floor to Madam Amelia Bones to take on from here.” And Dumbledore sat down smiling. Still there was no move from the crowd.

Amelia Bones smiled briefly at Dumbledore and turned to the crowd and the other members of the Wizengamot.

“We are all gathered here today to present a vote of no confidence against Minister Fudge. He has acted rashly and has been responsible for so many acts that has cost the Wizarding World and its people heavily. Those in favor?” she asked simply, not being in a mood for frivolities and long winding speeches.

All of the gasped but all of them except Dolores Umbridge and Percy Weasley put up their hands.

“Those against?”

Dolores Umbridge and Percy Weasley put up their hands defiantly.

Amelia Bones banged the hammer to signify that the motion had been passed.

“I now wish to propose as Minister for Wizarding World of Great Britain, Arthur Weasley.” She said. There was a total silence for about five minutes.

“I second the motion.” Dumbledore stood up quietly, telling himself this was the second of the many things he had to do in order to show Harry how sorry he was. Percy Weasley who was not privy to the

happenings in Grimmauld Place the last two days was flabbergasted. He was not in The Leaky Cauldron because he was in the Ministry of Magic trying to get to the six death eaters and bring information for Dumbledore.

He had read The Daily Prophet today morning and had thought it was another grandstand and had cursed The Daily Prophet for saying Dumbledore wanted to appease Harry Potter of all people. So this stance of Albus Dumbledore greatly unnerved him.

Amelia Bones looked at him in surprise and then smiled and banged the hammer. "Those in favor?"

Every hand went up except Percy Weasley who was staring at Dumbledore in shock and Dolores Umbridge who was looking around for Fudge and the dead Malfoy (she had not seen the bodies and so she refused to believe), to somehow appear and put the rest of them in their places. Both did not happen as Amelia Bones banged once more and said, "Motion passed. Arthur Weasley is the next Minister for Magic and I hope he will do a better job than Cornelius Fudge."

She did not even ask if anyone was against seeing that the show of hands was more than the required two thirds for electing a new Minister for Magic.

Arthur Weasley came forward to a tremendous applause that escalated to unheard of levels when everyone spotted the Boy-who-Lived, Harry Potter who had come forward with Arthur Weasley.

Arthur smiled at everyone and took his place at the center. "Thank you all of you esteemed members of the Wizengamot to select me as the Minister for Magic. I am deeply honored and will do my best to serve all the peoples of our world.

"I start my career as Minister by thanking Harry Potter for the efforts he has taken to capture the death eaters and weaken Voldemort." He smiled at the squeaks of fear at the name.

"It is high time we stopped fearing a wizard that is not a human and not a half breed creature or a fully magical being. These are the types that should receive our respect and treated as a part of our world. Not

that creature. Harry Potter who has been only ridiculed and treated unfairly by all of us, has been saving our hides repeatedly and he has once again challenged that creature that has caused our world so much harm and has killed off almost all the prominent pureblood families, and divided our world and is trying to almost make us extinct.

“But all that is in the past and I beseech each and every one of you to take your rightful stance as a proud member of the Wizarding World and make it the way our proud ancestors lived. Thank you.”

There was a minute of absolute silence as people realized the Minister had finished his speech. Then the entire room stood up and clapped loud and long. The reforms had begun.

At Voldemort's Hideout on the 2nd of August

Voldemort was completely in the dark about all the events that had happened the night before and he was not aware of the loss he had suffered and since he had no one coming to him with any more news he did not realize the carnage that had taken place in all the homes of his death eaters.

He was also researching the mind link in his vast library when he got a message.

It was from Snape plus a copy of the Quibbler of that morning. He opened the Quibbler first in curiosity, read the headlines that were on the front page and screamed. All the windows and the huge chandelier that hung in the center of the library cracked and smashed to smithereens.

On the top of the Quibbler Snape had written an urgent message to him, urging him to read the letter first. Voldemort read the paper once again disregarding the letter and grit his teeth. Then in a rage that made the walls of his empty hideout shudder, he opened the letter.

My Lord and Master,

I am extremely unfortunate to be the bearer of bad news my Lord; the Quibbler the rag that is not fit to be stamped upon by your boots has unfortunately given correct information. I am at a safe house with a few of our children including Draco, Arran, Ria, and the others who are so angry their magic is spiraling out of control as they are dealing with the grief of losing their parents. I will be leaving in a little while to go over to the Order of the Phoenix.

The things here are so perilous and I have escaped only because the blasted boy still thinks me to be a spy; I dare not expose myself and be surrounded by hostile forces before we are able to enact revenge. If I leave, our children here may be tempted to run to their own deaths. I have locked them forcibly with Black and blood magic, telling them that our Lord and Master will find a way out for us.

If you feel I did the wrong thing Master, please press the mark and I along with the children will come to you fighting our way through. When I get to the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix I will try and get some information about last night and also about the surviving death eaters and trying to get close to Potter to slip a portkey on to him that will bring him to you. Though in the last mentioned I do not know how successful I will be at this time.

Master, Dumbledore is trying to make up with Potter and Potter is slowly giving in. The life debt has been researched by the unspeakables apparently and it holds true. If you do not accept tomorrow, I believe that Potter is planning to send you the conditions of debt demanding you fulfill it. I feel it would be in our best interest to accept and one way would be for you to massacre Potter and those close to him, while Arran, Draco and I along with the others will be among the crowds killing everyone left, right and center.

Tomorrow all of us will somehow be there as spectators and if Master will write through this owl that I have at great peril sent, then all of us will fight the moment Master kills the dastardly Potter and payback the Wizarding World that dared to make us suffer such losses.

If Potter is cowardly to do something like this; that is he asks Master for his life tomorrow instead of fighting...

My Lord the second way to deal with this would be to take that one step back before plunging forward. We have one more horcrux; if you will tell me how to access it, then I will resurrect you within a day. Only give me the details of the ritual and in the aftermath of Potter's so called hollow victory I will use the bloody boy's blood, flesh and bones once again to resurrect you. If we need three persons we will use them and kill them. This time there will be no Potter, no one left to ask for a life debt from ME because I will be killing them before dividing them into bones, flesh and blood.

I hesitate to write this Master and I will understand if you will kill me for this but, the Prophecy is the damn thing that caused your killing curse to rebound sixteen years ago. If tomorrow the prophecy would be fulfilled, the mind link could be destroyed between you and Potter and it would be easy to resurrect you afresh.

To that extent if you were to duel and lose and ultimately be killed, then the mind link that has so worried us will come under scrutiny because Potter will then be in the same boat as we were last year. You My Lord will come back greater than ever tomorrow night and then WE WILL RULE. BUT WE WILL FIRST AVENGE OUR DEAD.

Your servant and slave

Severus Snape

Voldemort sniffed it and found traces of blood, Snape's blood. He was livid and very frightened. The life debt was true? All his Inner Circle and Outer Circle death eaters were dead. Fenrir was gone. That meant no more werewolves, because all the werewolves had joined only under threat and some heavy persuasion.

All the other death eaters living were captured and he had no one at the Unspeakables office or the Ministry to tell him what was happening. He had only Snape's letter. For a moment he wanted to call Snape and then he desisted. If Snape who was the only trusted member alive was also killed he would be left with no members he could trust.

He re-read the letter again and frowned when he read the passage about the horcrux. Did that mean Snape had some inside information and he wanted to Voldemort to be prepared to die?

Voldemort screamed in rage once again. This time, many books fell off the shelves as all the glass had already broken. He did not have a clue as to what he could do.

He had to accept the challenge else he would look weak and he would have already lost the war because no insane muggle would follow him let alone pure blood wizards and witches; and if he went there he could kill Harry Potter and then get eaten up by an angry Wizarding World or get killed by Potter and start roaming like a spirit once again waiting for someone to put him together. And he did not even have his Inner and Outer Circle to come back to.

And now Snape wanted him to die and then resurrect himself once again.

Voldemort shuddered. What if it took another thirteen years? This time Harry was an adult and by the time he got his body Potter would have finished his death eaters once and for all. Fifty years of hard work and thirteen years of being a spirit and now he was once again pushed back and this time he had fallen so hard, to get up was being almost impossible.

At that time another owl came to him. Usually owls without tracking charms could go anywhere but this was the first time in so many decades that Voldemort had received two of them.

Tom Marvolo Riddle,

I, Harry James Potter challenge you to a wizard's duel tomorrow at 5.00 P.M. at the Quidditch Pitch at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This parchment will serve as a portkey to that place. Of course if you do want to come through the gates you may do so but I am afraid you will have to fight a lot of people in the process. I think you have lost the werewolves because of Fenrir Greyback but you if you dare bring what vampires you have under your command and the dementors that are sucking souls for you, we will be prepared.

You really have a life debt that you owe me you know, and Snape is a traitor to your cause. He will never even think of communicating with you anymore so don't try calling him. That is why I did not attack the greasy git, though I very much wanted to. He was a spy FOR US. SO THERE!

You don't have anyone Voldemort; you are as alone as you made me. I have now made an orphan of you just as you did all those years ago when you killed my parents. Well my time for exacting revenge for that has come indeed. Bellatrix died at my hands. Sirius was avenged.

Only my parents' deaths remain. I will avenge them tomorrow, by killing you if you come and by winning you if you are that much of a coward and do not come.

With extreme distaste,

Harry Potter

P.S this parchment will activate at 4.55 P.M. tomorrow evening.

Voldemort's eyes almost popped out at the sheer nerve of that letter. Then another thing registered in his brain. Potter had killed Bella! Snape was a traitor who would never get in touch with him? But he had. Voldemort's eyes were triumphant for a second as he realized that Potter thought Snape was still on their side. So what Snape had said was true. Potter had left him because of that.

He could not take the dementors and the vampires because they would be vaporized by the Wizarding World that would come in full strength to watch the duel. He would have to attend because otherwise he would look weak. He slapped himself on his head and snarled at the helplessness he was feeling and all the thoughts there were making him mad.

He felt his head was spinning with so much information and like all terror leaders he was so far removed from reality and he had been relying on information from so many of his faithful death eaters that now he was literally alone in every sense.

No, he thought, Snape was there with him and also were Arran, and the others. But still he had lost the core group and he knew these were nowhere near the Inner Circle members who were filled up with the genuinely true believers of his ideals.

Today he had become a mockery and he knew he had no choice but to go there and defeat the bloody blasted ass of the Boy-who-Lived.

Bellatrix in a duel could push *him* to his limits; how did Potter defeat her? How did he get into their Manor in the first place and where was Arran at that time? Did Bellatrix scream at him to run and save himself? How did Snape meet Arran and the others? Where were they now and how would Snape be bringing them to Hogwarts tomorrow? He felt very faint as he contemplated everything and found that he had no answers to anything.

Voldemort paced the floor thinking furiously. In three days Harry Potter had successfully demolished him, Dumbledore and the Ministry. He sighed when he realized he did not even have his familiar, Nagini with him.

He took the Quibbler from where he had thrown it in a rage and slowly read it once again and also read Snape's letter and Harry's missive. After three more such reads, he sighed.

He had no choice but to go there and be killed by Harry Potter. He had finally understood what Snape was trying to tell him. If he was killed, then the Wizarding World would be very happy. But if he killed Potter, then he knew they would shred him to pieces there because there was no way he and the very few inexperienced death eaters except Snape and Arran of course, could take on the entire Wizarding World. Even he was not that powerful.

Snape was asking him for the location of the horcrux and the details of the very secret ritual that he had not shared with anyone to resurrect him once more with the help of Harry Potter or by other means. He, Voldemort would not have a life debt because unlike last time he would not perform the ritual but Snape would and if he killed Potter and two others or three different persons for the bones, flesh and blood for the ritual to there would be no claim of any life debt.

Voldemort's brain kicked into overdrive and he started thinking and planning for tomorrow. After half an hour of pacing he summoned a parchment and a quill to him.

First he sent a message to Harry Potter with the owl that was waiting patiently.

I will be there

Voldemort wrote only those words on a piece of parchment and he sent the owl away.

He paced the floor for some more time and then he went to one end of his huge library and pointed his wand and said a long chant. The book shelf opened and revealed a very small space where was nestled a beautiful ring – a lovely emerald surrounded by diamonds on a simple gold band. This was surprisingly the ring of Gryffindor and his last horcrux. If this was destroyed, he would die.

He took out a small wooden box and placed the ring in it and sealed it. He shrunk it and wrote Snape.

Severus,

I have received your letter and after much thought I am sending you the last horcrux I have made. This is a ring of Gryffindor and you will do your utmost to ensure I am resurrected by tomorrow night, preferably not using Potter in any manner.

I wish to come back to life and kill him myself. There is no change in that. I need to avenge the death of all my people as well and I will start from Potter. Do not bring Arran and the others now. You will be there in along with the Light so do not leave Arran and the others alone in the crowd.

Come to the graveyard at Little Hangleton tomorrow night and we will perform the ritual. Bring three persons bound and we will take their bones, flesh and blood and then kill them on the spot so that there will be no mention of a debt, life or otherwise.

As you have mentioned the mind link will be revealed for what it is tomorrow. So we will be prepared on that count as well. I will tell you about the ritual tomorrow night.

You have been my most loyal follower Severus I will richly reward you tomorrow night. Take care Severus and bring this ring and the others tomorrow night. Our new lives will begin!

Lord Voldemort

He placed the box and the parchment and sent the owl away and started pacing the floor angry, confused, terrified and nervous.

It was a long time until tomorrow evening after all.

End of Chapter – 33

Chapter – 34

Arthur Weasley the new Minister for Magic apparated to Godric's Hollow after a short while at the Ministry of Magic. He had met with all the department heads of different sections, asked for each and every employee to be checked for the *imperious* and also to testify if they were a death eater under six drops of veritaserum instead of the required three.

The moment they said they were not a death eater and they were not sympathetic to Voldemort's causes they were given the anti – dote. Percy Weasley and Dolores Umbridge were removed from their positions because they were very close to the former Minister for Magic who had already been declared as of dubious character.

Umbridge was asked three more questions. Had she sent the dementors to Privet Drive and had she almost cast the *cruciatus* before she was stopped by one Hermione Granger and had she handed out punishments with a blood quill that was considered illegal by the Ministry of Magic?

She had struggled hard but had not been able to overcome the veritaserum and the veritas spell and admitted to doing all the three things. The moment she admitted to her crimes she was arrested on charges of illegal punishments and ordering dementors to attack an innocent underage wizard. She had also misused her position in Hogwarts when she had been sent of behalf of the Ministry as the DADA professor by making life very difficult for the students by her silly and stifling decrees and illegal punishments.

Umbridge screeched and asked to be allowed to go free because she had done all that with the express permission of the former Minister for Magic. But the moment she testified under a truth spell combined with veritaserum, she was given a life imprisonment sentence at Azkaban.

Percy Weasley was demoted because he had sympathized with Fudge and Umbridge and since their roles in the war was highly suspicious; he was removed from his current position and was sent to

work at monitoring the many floor entrances at the reception Hall of the Ministry of Magic.

Percy was livid and he stormed away after he listened to the Minister's very cold and formal words and apparated to The Burrow to wait for his father to come home so that he could give the new Minister a piece of his mind and also get back his job. He also tried calling Hogwarts from there all the time but there was no one at the Headmaster's office and there was no one at The Burrow.

Percy waited until lunch before sending a Patronus to Ron and Ginny and knowing from them there was no one at Grimmauld Place, apparated there. Ron and Ginny had been terrified to leave Grimmauld Place and they had been left alone there for the last two days. Dumbledore had not come and nor had their parents. When Percy had messaged they had at once asked him to come over.

Percy got the shock of his life when he saw his brother and sister all alone and he heard all that his brother and sister had to say and he suddenly understood Dumbledore's actions far better and also understood his defense of the Boy-who-Lived.

"So Dad knows. That is why he punished me like this." And he told Ron and Ginny briefly about being demoted to monitoring floors in the Ministry.

"But Percy how could dad punish you. It is not as if he is someone of importance at the Ministry and has the authority." Ron asked him very puzzled.

Percy grimaced and looked straight at Ron, "Did dad say he would not have anything to do with all three of us?"

Ron nodded and Ginny's eyes filled with tears.

"Ron he has become the new Minister for Magic." Percy told him in a very low and disturbed voice.

"What!" shouted two voices, both amazed and shocked.

Ron's face was red with an effort not to cry. Ginny on the other hand was crying.

"Harry pushed him for Minister and dad accepted is what is doing the rounds at the Ministry. He had already arrested Umbridge and has given her life in Azkaban for almost casting an unforgivable at Harry and sending the dementors to his home last year."

Ginny fainted on hearing that and Ron looked as if he would join his sister.

Percy hastened to Ginny's side and enervated her and she held on to Percy tightly as she sobbed loudly.

"What happened?" Percy was bewildered and slowly Ron and Ginny told him everything. He was horrified. He had never accepted money from the Headmaster because he had truly believed Harry to be absolutely delusional. Once Voldemort came on the scene, Percy started working in secret to aid Dumbledore when he learned of the Prophecy, after the mess at the Ministry's Department of Mysteries two years ago.

He had been initially shocked to know Ron and Ginny were also in the loop but then it had made him triumphant and very glad and also gave him hope for the rest of the family to be alienated from Harry Potter whom he now thought was a danger to them.

Deep inside he had not agreed with the money taking, but he realized that as far as Ron and Ginny were concerned that was what was keeping them in line and obedient to Dumbledore and also keeping this away from their parents. So he had not said anything and in fact encouraged Ron and Ginny to try and sway the Twins and Bill and Charlie to their point of view.

But the *imperious* had shocked him and if Harry and his parents knew, well he could understand everything much better now. Dumbledore was a fallen man and no wonder he had seconded Amelia Bones for his father to become the new Minister.

Fudge was missing and aurors had broken into his home and found the broken wand and an empty house. They were now searching for

him and he was already declared a fugitive. His vault was also empty and the goblins had told the aurors he had converted all his money into muggle currency. The muggle police were also informed and were searching for him.

The two brothers and sister sat there desolately wondering what and more importantly how everything had gone wrong in such a horrible manner no less. Now Ron and Ginny were beginning to understand all that they had lost and they did not like it one bit.

To think half an unforgivable had placed Umbridge in Azkaban for the rest of her life. They had cast four of them. Ginny trembled and Ron was raging at what he had lost and was fuming at the unfairness of it all.

Half an hour later of sitting in a haunted silence they looked up hearing the sounds of apparition.

Arthur Weasley the new Minister of magic apparated into Godric's Hollow and went straight to his sleeping son and the other two. Snape, and Arran whose eyes were slightly red told him they were doing fine and seeing for himself they were still recovering, Arthur slumped tiredly onto the sofa in the living room.

The portraits had been told all that had happened and now Sirius smiled at Arthur.

"Congratulations!" he said.

Molly beamed proudly as Arthur smiled at him. "Thank you Sirius. I only hope I will be up to doing all this."

"Of course you will dad. What a pessimistic comment." Charlie smiled at his father equally proudly.

"I think we should call for all members of the Order of the Phoenix and tell them to patrol the grounds tomorrow Mr. Weasley and also ask Dumbledore to strengthen the wards against dementors,

vampires and werewolves.” Harry told him when the owl he had sent to Voldemort came in.

Harry drew his wand and checked it for portkey and other spells and then drew the letter and read the words aloud.

All of them were silent and after a moment Snape came and stood close to Harry. He had not received a response to his letter and he was scared. Arran came to stand by his side as well looking very determined.

“Do we have to do this Harry? I have already lost too much to this war my dear.” Molly was trembling. The relaxed atmosphere of a minute ago was gone and all of them were now very tense.

“Mrs. Weasley all that we have done yesterday will be in vain if we do not do this. I will try my best to kill him and I am sure Voldemort will tell Severus or Arran about the other horcrux. He has to for resurrecting once again. They will destroy it at that time if he does not write an answer now.

“If I do not kill him; be rest assured I will take him down with me and then the same status quo remains, destroy the horcrux and Voldemort is gone. I have made Snape and Arran the executor of all my assets and they will continue all that we spoke about the other day and Mr. Weasley as Minister and Amelia Bones as Auror Head will give you all help needed and I will talk to guys from my portrait.” He finished softly smiling at everyone.

No one smiled back. Snape and Arran stepped closer and Snape was trembling very badly and Arran who was already upset about his parents was shaking as well.

“Guys this is war. We have killed so many people yesterday and by doing so broke so many families, even though they were death eaters. We did because all of us wanted to save our world. Tomorrow we must do this. This way no one else will get hurt.” Harry ran down at the silence in that room.

“Let him try to kill you Harry,”

“We will simply,”

“Annihilate him.”

The Twins spoke in a very ugly serious tone that looked out of place.

Harry nodded seriously. “You must kill him if he finishes me off and tries to escape. Only then would he turn to Sev and Arran with the information about the horcrux.”

There was silence that seemed to stretch forever. All of them contemplated about this boy who was willing to die so that all of them may win. They really did not know what to say. Snape felt his as if heart was shattering into pieces. He had protested right from the time Harry had put forth this proposal. At the time no one else had said anything because they still had all the death eaters to kill and one more horcrux to destroy.

Now Snape did not know how he was to live the rest of his life without this child. Harry had made him and Arran the sole beneficiaries in his will and had taken a promise from him and Arran that they would continue his dreams if something happened to him.

At that time Arran and he had been smiling and sarcastic telling Harry he was going nowhere; now Snape could smell the terror on Arran as well. Arran had not said a word but Snape knew Arran loved Harry as he did and he saw Harry as his family and his link to the Sirius and Regulus Black more than his mother who had been born a Black.

At that time the second owl came from Voldemort and Snape hurried and casting the revealing charms saw a box that was literally pulsating darkness.

Arran levitated the box and Snape took out the parchment and began to read. He read swiftly and then he went to Harry and swept him off his feet and swung him round and round uncaring about the tears that were running down his face.

Arran and the others looked dumbfounded at this and Harry was squealing to be let down.

Then Arran grabbed the letter from Snape and read it swiftly and then grinned and read it to the others.

“YAY!” everyone screamed and then there was a huge impromptu party at lunchtime.

All of them were in high spirits and Snape dashed off a beautiful letter to Voldemort saying all the right things and suddenly the mood was different.

Harry grinned at everyone feeling relieved inside. He too, had been terrified of dying especially when he had found Snape, Hermione, Arran, his parents and Sirius *and* when they were winning the war. But he had pushed those feelings down and had quietly prepared his portrait and had started updating it.

Snape had stared at the portrait and had refused to speak to Harry, but the time they had in between planning, ordering for his portrait and preparing his will had been very little and Snape had no time as did the others to think, contemplate and discuss it.

They had been jumping from one thing to another and suddenly when it came to Harry meeting Voldemort where he may be killed had done nothing for Snape and the others who were terrified that Harry would no longer be on the scene after tomorrow. The fact he had made wills and portraits only increased the fear.

Hermione had not said a word because she had been from the beginning with Harry and she knew how important this was for him and so did McGonagall, but she had been feeling exactly the same way Snape had. How could she ever move on and live a life without Harry was something that would simply not come to her. She had stayed silent and had prayed something would happen to make this confrontation unnecessary.

Now that they had the last horcrux, and Voldemort was prepared to die, it was absolutely fine.

“Destroy it right now.” Arthur Weasley told Snape.

“No, don’t.” Harry told them.

“But why Harry? It would be all for the best.” Arthur argued.

“Mr. Weasley, we must not touch it until tomorrow evening, until Voldemort dies. The moment he dies Sev and Arran who will be here guarding the horcrux will destroy it. I will have my earring activated and they will know at once. They must not and will not come to Hogwarts to watch the duel. Until then I feel we should not do anything. We should simply sit tight on this. We do not know if Voldemort has an additional charm on this that he has connected to him. We should not alert him to anything and make him go underground.” Harry argued back.

Snape nodded wiping his eyes and Arran who had slung his arm around Harry’s shoulder also nodded dashing his other hand over his now very red eyes.

“Harry is correct Arthur. Arran, Molly, Hermione, Pansy and in fact all of us here will stay here to guard this thing. You must be there as the new Minister. Kingsley, Tonks, Amelia Bones, Brian Wheeler and all the aurors will be there and they along with the Order whom we will now ask Dumbledore to gather together and be ready to fight if Voldemort looks like escaping.” Snape told him with a smile.

Arthur Weasley sent a patronus to Dumbledore and all members of the Order to come to Grimmauld Place in an hour where they would be holding discussions with Harry Potter about the duel tomorrow and also asked Dumbledore to write the secret of the house for him to allow a few others to be there as well.

After talking and planning some more, all of them apparated to Grimmauld Place leaving Dobby and Winky with the healing patients and telling them to come for the others if they so much moved. Apparating to Grimmauld Place they found Percy along with Ron and Ginny looking very scared. Arthur looked coldly at them but did not say a word and waited for Dumbledore to arrive.

He came in five minutes and was a bit unnerved to find all those who had seen the memories the other day. He flushed and handed a slip of paper to Arthur who gave it to Harry who apparated at once with Snape and Hermione.

In five minutes there were sounds of apparition and Dumbledore and all the Order members who had come almost the moment they had received the summons were totally stunned seeing the faces of Pansy Parkinson, Blaise Zabini and two unfamiliar persons.

Dumbledore drew his breath sharply and Moody had his wand out when he saw the Sirius look alike and another person, a girl who was stunning and holding on to the boy's arm.

"Come on all of you. Arran you know this place, this is Grimmauld Place – the home of the Noble and Ancient House of the Blacks. Wait for a minute for Harry to come and show you around. He would want to I think." Molly beamed and called Dobby and Winky to make some tea and snacks for all of them.

Arran nodded and looked around his mother's home and his eyes fell on Ron, Ginny and Percy and his lips curled. They were gaping at him and Ron and Ginny were sweating with fear.

No one spoke to the three and in fact no one spoke at anyone else until Harry came back half an hour later with more Slytherins. They had been at the shop and now were at Grimmauld Place looking around with just a tinge of fear.

Moody was itching to have a go at all of them but at this point he did not quite dare. So he sat still and alert and watched all of them.

All of them had read the Quibbler that had details of the various attacks and also about the challenge and now they were looking eagerly at Harry for some explanations.

"Please sit down all of you." Harry's quiet voice carried to everyone and all of them sat down and there was only silence.

Next Harry to everyone's surprise requested Molly and Hermione to bring the Slytherins some thing to eat and drink. Once that was done Harry went to one side of the room and stood there surveying all of them silently for a minute.

"I called all of you here today to inform you that the war with Voldemort will come to an end tomorrow. Voldemort has accepted my challenge for a duel."

All of them gasped and squeaked as they understood what Harry was telling them.

"I am going to try my best to kill him tomorrow. If I don't and am injured, I will be wearing a portkey that will take me to safety and at that time I want all of you Order members who will also be helped by the entire auror squad to simply cast cutting curses and if you can manage it killing curses at him so that he does not escape from there alive."

"Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Harry he cannot die like that," When he was cut off by Harry.

"Yes I know Headmaster and all his horcruxes are destroyed."

Dumbledore gasped and all of them squealed in fear. Horcruxes?

"Voldemort had made many horcruxes and all of them have been destroyed. So no need to worry Headmaster. And before you begin to look suspiciously at all of them here," Harry swept his hand to indicate the Slytherins and Arran and Ria, "these people are mine and are with me and have been cleared by both veritaserum and the veritas spell by the Ministry and you may verify with Amelia Bones who personally checked each and every one of them. So I will not tolerate any name calling or insulting comments directed against them."

There was a silence and Dumbledore was astounded. All his horcruxes destroyed and Harry had so much of backing? He felt the feeling of sheer jealousy and bitterness sweeping through him. Harry had the power, the people and he was the major player in the Wizarding World today.

In five minutes he had changed the Minister for Magic and he had brought his own man Arthur Weasley as the new Minister. He had destroyed all the horcruxes and he had made Voldemort accept his challenge. Dumbledore had become a nonentity in one day.

He could not even raise objections because Harry had those memories that would place him in Azkaban in ten minutes if he dared to put a step wrong. He sighed. He was very envious of the way Harry had gathered all these people to him and the enormous control he had over them.

"I only want an oath that none of you will leak what I have told you here to anyone."

All of them still in a daze gave their oaths, including Dumbledore, Moody, Percy, Ron and Ginny, the last three very sulkily.

Then Harry thanked all of them and slowly all the Order members left one by one.

"Harry," Dumbledore called out softly to him as he was standing up to walk away with Arran to show him around the place. Only Harry's side remained apart from Percy, Ron, Ginny, Dumbledore and Moody.

Harry turned around politely and looked enquiringly at Dumbledore.

"I wish to apologize," Harry lifted a hand and stopped him.

"Please do not say a word more Headmaster. Please do not apologize for failing to get Sirius a trial and for paying money to these two to spy on me, to bind my magic and my gifts and most of all for not training me right. I looked up to you and trusted you implicitly, only to find you have not only betrayed that trust but you were even planning to do something to Sirius had he not fallen into the veil and you did nothing about the *imperios* and I know you have listening charms in our dorm. So please don't insult me by apologizing and hoping all this will simply vanish."

Harry looked very sadly at him, "While I could forgive you for everything," and watched him sag in relief, "I can never forgive you and Moody for wishing Sirius dead." He finished softly and turned away.

Dumbledore crumbled, totally crushed and defeated in front of all of them. He realized he had to be mentally prepared to give up his position as the Head of the Wizengamot and also as Headmaster of

Hogwarts. Dumbledore bit his lips at all that he had lost. He turned heavily and apparated away.

“Potter?” a gruff voice called out to Harry in the stillness of the room.

Harry turned to see Moody looking at him with a flush on his cheeks that made him look very strange.

“I realize that we were wrong in treating you thus and also all that about Sirius and your money. I was with Albus when we took you out of the wreckage at Godric's Hollow and at that time your entire aura was Black and there were fumes coming off it. I am afraid I let it go to my head especially when Albus told me there was a mental link with You-Know-Who and I was afraid he would manipulate you through the link. I never aspired for your money or anything else.

“I made those very insensitive comments only because at that time I thought Sirius did not understand the link and you having visions only strengthened my belief about You-Know-Who's manipulations. I never meant harm for Sirius or you for anything else. I thought you must die because of the link that would either destroy you or join you with him. I agreed that when you did go down you must take You-Know-Who with him. When I knew Sirius would not agree with this, well this was war was all I thought.

“That was why I also joined in the binding of powers and gifts and the scheme to break you. I am also prepared to go to Azkaban if you wish me to for all this because I understand all this is of my own making and I deserve the punishment. All this I swear on my magic and I understand you will not want me around and I will not disturb you longer but my paranoia went a bit too far and for that I am truly sorry.”

Harry was dumbstruck when he saw the swirl of magic that surrounded Moody and saw him still standing. All the others too were stunned. No one had heard the auror talk so much and never had they ever seen him admitting to anything wrong. Well until now he had not done anything wrong except that he was suspicious of his own reflection.

Harry was silent for a few minutes and Moody looked straight at him, standing erect and proud. He had made a terrible mistake but he was willing to make amends, even go to Azkaban and pay for them. His extreme paranoia had caused him to do all this and now he was man enough to not only take the blame and the responsibility for his actions but also the punishment.

“Well Mr. Moody. I have something you could do you to correct the wrongs that you have made. Are you interested?” Harry asked the standing at attention auror.

“Yes Mr. Potter.” Moody stepped forward and laid his wand at Harry feet. All the others were totally taken aback at the gesture.

Harry was shocked and he summoned Moody’s wand and looked at Moody who was once again standing straight and looking at him steadily and with no emotion except acceptance of his position and acceptance of what ever punishment Harry would give him, in his eyes.

“I need a defense against the dark arts teacher at the University I am planning to open this September. Would you be interested in the job? You must at least work for ten years before I can truly forgive you.” He asked the old auror with a small smile stretching his hand holding the Moody’s wand towards him.

With Moody it had not been personal. He would have taken this stance with anyone and he would not have backed off. Harry could understand that.

“What?” there was a stunned cry from most of them in the room. Harry did not react but kept looking at the old auror and slowly saw Moody’s face light up in comprehension of what Harry was offering him and he smiled.

“I do not deserve it but I will accept it to do amends. Thank you Mr. Potter.” the old and still formidable auror said gruffly.

“Please call me Harry or Potter as usual. No Mr. Potter, please.” Harry smiled this time more widely and Moody cleared his throat gruffly.

"It an honor lad and I will call you both. Thank you and I accept and I will teach well and strongly until you ask me to leave." he turned around and looked at all the others.

Arthur smiled first and Molly gave a small sob of relief and happiness and the others grinned.

"It is okay Moody and next time you want to do stuff like this for heaven's sake consult more than one man." Arthur told him shaking his hand and Moody grinned and then looked around at the others suspiciously pulling out the wand he had Harry had just given back to him.

"You have taken their oaths haven't you?" he asked in a gruff whisper.

Harry started laughing. He just could not help it, Moody had just been on the brink of Azkaban and he says a quick 'thank you' and starts off all over again.

"Moody is it?" Arran drawled looking at him amusement dancing in his eyes that were still a bit red and slightly puffy.

Moody nodded his wand on the alert and his magical eyes staring straight at Arran.

"I was the one with all the ancient magic stuff with Rabastan. Want to discuss all that with me?" he asked casually.

Moody's eyes rotated so fast it was nauseating. "What? You were the one whom mpghn." Arran had placed his hands on Moody's mouth and dragged him alone and spoke softly to him for a minute. Moody nodded furiously.

Harry grinned. Who knew what Arran was pouring into Moody's ears?

"Hey Arran! Come on. Let me show you your mom's place. Your grandaunt is also here, screeching away to glory. You can fill his ears with rubbish later." Harry laughed.

"Potter, lad's not filling me with rubbish. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! He was telling me about how to get into Alecto's home and also the

homes of Zabini and a few others. Apparently Zabini still has the inferi running around.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Clever Arran. He had diverted Moody’s attention from once again getting into suspicions all the while. Snape sneered at him and dragged Moody into a sarcastic argument and suddenly it was like old times in the Order of the Phoenix only without Dumbledore and far more comfortable.

Harry dragged Arran off to the dark hallway and went to the curtains and called, “Kreacher!”

There was a sharp crack and an old elf came muttering, “Well the filthy half blood has come to the great House of my Mistress,” he glared malevolently at Harry and then looked at Arran and stopped in shock and then bowed low.

“Master?” it asked him greatly confused to see Arran with Harry of all people.

Arran did not answer but crouched down.

“Kreacher, how are you? Are you doing okay?” he asked gently.

To Harry’s shock, Kreacher jumped into Arran’s arms and held on to Arran just like Dobby did to Harry and sobbed.

“Master these people are plotting to kill you. Please go away from them and be saved.” It sobbed on Arran’s chest.

“Kreacher, what have I told you about Master Regulus?” Arran asked it.

Kreacher looked at Harry suspiciously and then looked at Arran.

“Mother and father are dead Kreacher.” Arran told it softly and looked into its eyes communicating something all the time.

A few minutes later Kreacher sighed and nodded. Arran straightened and smiled. “I don’t need to keep her photo anymore.”

"Is that you Arran?" a soft voice came from above them. Kreacher looked and smiled at the portrait of Mrs. Black.

"Aunt Wilhelmina, this is a pleasure. How are you?"

She smiled sadly at him, "Sirius is dead as Regulus was, do you know?" she asked him and Harry stared and was unconsciously moved deeply by the sadness in her voice, a voice that had only shrieked insults all this while, even at Sirius, especially at Sirius. He started moving away to give Mrs. Black and Arran privacy, but Arran dragged him back.

Arran nodded at his grandaunt's portrait that was drinking Arran's features. "You look so much like my Reg and Siri, Arran. I feel very glad you have come here at last. How did you manage to come here? This place is still under Dumbledore's control."

"Draco is also alive aunt, and he will be here soon. We Blacks will soon be roaming here."

She smiled sadly at him.

"We allied with Harry, aunt." He answered her query from before.

"He is with Dumbledore." She replied quietly.

"He is not and I will give the Quibbler and The Daily Prophet to Kreacher and ask him to read it out for you. Sirius has his own portrait at Godric's Hollow and he along with Harry's parents would love to come here and talk to you in greater detail. I will ask him to come by bringing a portrait from there and aligning it with the magic here." Arran told her determinedly.

She smiled and a glow lit up her face when Arran spoke of Sirius. "When? I wish to make amends and make him understand that though we were dark wizards and with Voldemort earlier, I behaved so badly because of Dumbledore and his Order. I did not want them here. Is Reg's portrait there too?" she asked hopefully.

Arran shook his head. He turned to Harry, "May I go to Godric's Hollow and ask them?"

"Sure and bring the Hogwarts portrait. All of them will have more space to move." Harry grinned a bit stunned at him and a second later Arran disappeared.

She turned to look at Harry.

"We were with Voldemort until Reg died." She told him quietly. He sent a letter that came to me and his father the moment he died. In that he told us all about Voldemort. But we were too deep and Sirius was already gone; he had left the house and was living with the Potters. Within a month of Regulus's death my husband died of a broken heart when we realized we had lost both our children.

"I died within a month of Sirius being declared a death eater. I knew he wasn't; he loved your father but who would believe me and where could I go to establish that. I had let him down as well. Then after thirteen years he came back here and started working with the damn Order that had done nothing for him. I went mad and since Kreacher and I could do only this screeching and insulting, we did that. Sirius never understood."

"How did Kreacher betray Sirius then? If he had not lied to me, I would have never gone and if I had never gone Sirius would have never ventured out." Harry's voice still choked with grief as he glared at Mrs. Black and then at Kreacher.

"Do not blame him Mr. Potter. Lucius had Narcissa place him under the imperious and he ordered Narcissa who is a Black, to make him say those words if any member of the Order would ask him that question, especially you, Mr. Potter. Narcissa had no choice. She would have been killed for being a traitor after watching Draco being tortured and killed. They had that over her head all the time."

Harry was stunned. "How did you know Arran?"

"I met with her Harry. Once I read the journals from Regulus I was able to come here as I shared the same blood. I used to come here a lot until Sirius escaped and then I stopped coming because aunt told me it would be dangerous and told me to stay away until she could speak with him and that never happened thanks to Dumbledore and

Sirius's own stubbornness to even look at his mother." Arran had come with a small portrait in his hands.

"Lucius removed the imperious once Sirius fell into the veil; rather Narcissa did, didn't she Kreacher?" Kreacher nodded his eyes full of tears that were pouring down.

"He insulted all of you and Sirius on my commands Mr. Potter. I wanted all of them to leave and wanted some time alone with Sirius so that I could talk to him and tell him the other side of the story especially about Regulus's great sacrifice and bring Arran, Draco and Ria here. But that was not to be as Sirius was never alone and he was always very short and rude because he knew us as we were; death eaters and would not give us the time of the day. That made me scared to confide such things to him, especially when I was not sure it would be kept from Dumbledore."

Two streams of tears rolled down her eyes.

"Hello Mrs. Black." Lily's voice sounded softly and she whirled around and not answering Lily, looked beyond her who had spoken softly, to see Sirius who was standing stiffly and glaring at his mother.

"Can all of you give me some privacy with my son?" the insane until now Mrs. Black asked them.

Arran had brought another portrait and he now took it into the meeting room and hung it there. It was the picture of Hogwarts. There had been four portraits of the School hanging at various places at Godric's Hollow and Arran had brought one to stick it up here. The portrait that he had in the hallway was a plain one with a few chairs.

He put it up and went to tell Lily and James to come here and meet the rest.

James and Lily came very fast giving Mrs. Black and Sirius the time to talk and understand each other; a task they had failed in their lifetime – now they would try to overcome the failure.

Harry came with his parents and looked very sad. Snape went to him and soon Harry was leaning on him and telling him everything in soft

tones and getting comforted by him, who had an arm firmly around the boy he had not thought, would live beyond tomorrow just a few hours ago.

Ron and Ginny looked at Harry stunned and shocked to see him leaning on the bloody greasy git for support and *Snape* of all people holding him tightly and apparently comforting him.

The other Slytherins by now had made themselves comfortable and were watching the show. They had taken to glaring at Ron, Ginny and Percy whenever they turned to look at them and these three had to turn away blushing.

Ron and Ginny wanted to run away and hide in their rooms but did not quite dare.

"May be if we apologize like Moody, Harry will forgive us." Ron whispered to Ginny. She looked at him for a moment in hope and then her eyes fell again. She shook her head, Harry had not even looked at them and though Hermione had, it was only to glare at them her lips curling up when she had looked at them as if they were some slimy things and then had gone to chat up with the Slytherins.

While she was so free with them; she had not even come to the dark corner where they had been sitting not even to shout at them.

Molly, after a while when all of them except the three isolated Weasleys had relaxed fully, sent the Slytherins to the topmost floor with Kreacher and told them to stay there until the next day when the duel would take place.

"Wait until tomorrow dears and then Harry, Severus and Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler will come and take you to the Ministry and declare you completely innocent and allow you to go to your homes and live your lives in peace. Now all of you go up where Kreacher will show you where you can take some rest until then. Relax and Kreacher will bring your dinner to you if you don't feel like coming down. Those who do want to come down, come down by eight for dinner, alright? Even if we are not there Kreacher will serve you."

The Slytherins were more than glad to leave and soon Moody also left after Harry who seemed fine now, told him the secret of Godric's Hollow, "Come there tomorrow Moody and we will start making preparations."

The old auror grinned at him and turned and apparated away to his home to spend the rest of his day in a peace that had been missing for the last few days.

"You are a fool Potter." Snape drawled the moment Moody had left. Only the Weasleys

"But why Severus?' Harry asked him with a dramatic grin, all recovered from the anger and the sadness after talking to Mrs. Black; anger towards Lucius Malfoy and Dumbledore and sadness for her and Sirius.

Snape rolled his eyes. "Forgiving Moody was one thing. Making him the DADA professor and that too for ten years was entirely another. You, you..., yes that is it. You Gryffindor." He insulted cheerfully giving Ron and Ginny a heart attack at seeing a cheerful Snape and making the others snicker.

"But that is Harry." Molly beamed not being able to forget Harry had allowed the Weasleys to handle Ron and Ginny privately and saving them from an eternal shame. The shame was there in all their hearts and Molly was sure it would burn until they died, but at least that shame was not made public.

Harry smiled at her and Snape rolled his eyes.

"Father?" Percy called softly at that time.

Arthur Weasley who had been laughing at Harry and Snape turned and stiffened when he realized it was Percy who was calling him.

"Yes Percival?" he asked coldly.

Percy gulped but went on bravely.

"Father I have done no wrong. I have only merely fished for information and gave Dumbledore when I got any from Fudge's office. Yes I did not want any of you to be with Harry," here he blushed and valiantly continued, "I thought to associate with Harry was dangerous and so I tried my best to pull Ron and Ginny away. You cannot demote me dad, I have done no wrong."

"But you are not correct Percy." Arthur Weasley told him softly, "I think it is dangerous to associate with men like Fudge and women like Umbridge who are best friends with Malfoy and who misuse their authority by sending dementors and casting unforgivables," here he glared at Ron and Ginny and watching them gulp he turned to Percy once again, "and as Minister I can hardly allow you to be in a position of responsibility because you have shown only poor judgment in your dealings with people."

"That is not fair father. All of us trusted Dumbledore as well and you are also part of those persons." Percy protested.

"Yes and the moment I knew him and my children were committing not just mistakes but grievous offenses that by right should land them in Azkaban; after all I gave that punishment to Umbridge, I made sure to move away at once. Have you done so Percy? Why even Moody was prepared to go to Azkaban for the mistakes he committed."

"I was spying for Dumbledore."

"Yes, but you did not distance yourself from the Minister and nor you did like Severus did, inform the Order about your spying. And you also knew about Harry magic being bound and his gifts sealed. That Percy is a crime that can get you life in Azkaban. Why do you think Dumbledore is so meek? You did not care for Harry's power's being bound because all of you had mentally killed him off. Well I say none of you have any right to kill another person unless you are all death eaters?"

"That's not fair dad." Ron shouted coming to stand along with Percy, "all of you killed yesterday. So does that make you death eaters, you and your precious Boy-who-Lived."

SLAP!

Ron was stunned and he turned to look at Hermione who was shaking with anger with her hands ready to slap him once more.

"You Ron have cast two unforgivable curses and are part of a scheme to kill the Boy-who-Lived. Shall I ask your father to open that case publicly?"

Ron held his cheek and kept looking at Hermione in shock.

"Or you think you are justified because Harry is the Boy-who-Lived, he is public property meant to be used and thrown away oh and let me not forget after robbing him of his money as well? Perhaps you think Harry is fit only to be killed?" she shouted.

"You don't talk. You are always with him and never with me." Ron shouted bitterly jealous she had sided with Harry.

"You mean I should have been with you and helped you to make better plans to kill Harry? She asked him scathingly before she continued angrily,

"You are way behind the news Ron. Dumbledore had fallen, Moody has admitted to his mistakes and the death eaters are all gone. Most of these slimy Slytherins were the ones who helped us to win the war. Not brave Gryffindors like you and Ginny and Percy who wanted Harry, Harry's money, Harry's houses and let me not forget Harry's life and win the war after God knows how many deaths of innocent people. But you Gryffindors don't care do?"

Ron looked at her in anger and defeat. "You will never understand."

"Understand what?" Charlie asked Ron, "Understand you are miserably jealous of Harry. Oh but we all do Ronnie. And of course we all understand Ginny is a slut. No doubts there as well and Percy the sycophant is also a wonderful assessment of his character."

"I am not a slut Charlie. Don't say that." Ginny simply howled.

"I am not jealous of Scarhead here." Ron was shouting now shaking with jealousy, bitterness and anger and words fell off his mouth; words that should have never been said.

“So I cast the *imperio*. So what? It was to make Harry be less reckless and less inclined to kill off people close to him like he did to Sirius. Yesterday Harry cast the killing curse and killed off God knows how many people. Is that fine? No one seems to be arresting him. Yes, I took money, so what; it is not as if our pathetic dad was smothering us in riches and luxury was he?

“All the time wearing secondhand clothes, eating leftovers worrying about how to make ends meet and even buying floo powder has to be planned. And mum pretending as if dad was doing fine and was *the* best when dad has no ambition and he is not worthy. He could not even get us new books and wands HEY! OUCH, OW, OW,” suddenly Ron screamed.

SLAP! PUNCH! WHAM! BIFF! PUNCH!

“Ouch, ouch, stop it you stop it.” Ron was screaming and along with him Hermione was screaming too, “Stop it Harry, and stop it. You will kill him.”

Arthur, Molly and Charlie were standing there stunned at Ron’s bitter words.

Harry had been listening in sheer disbelief to Ron’s words and the moment he heard all that come out of his mouth Harry lost control, he did not even realize he was kicking Ron, he went punching and hitting Ron and Ron after the initial shock and a few yells was hitting right back.

The Twins ran to hit Ron when they heard their mother sob and sway and ran to her; Harry was doing a good job after all. Charlie after the initial shock was holding his shaking father and was trembling himself.

It was Snape and Arran who finally tore them apart when it became apparent that Harry would not stop and they might end up killing each other. Hermione was trying to pull Harry away and was thrown by a hit from Ron and Ginny who was trying to pull Ron away was also hit by Ron’s punch.

Harry went on hitting Ron and then Percy, who had joined to help Ron after he saw the blows Harry was handing out. Harry finally fell on Pansy and Blaise who struggled to hold him because he wanted to kill Ron once and for all and was screaming to be released by them when Snape and Arran came and took over from them.

Harry had two black eyes, a broken nose, cuts on his cheeks, and had been punched just about everywhere. Ron was worse, his jaw was hanging rather strangely, he too had two black eyes, his three teeth were broken and he was bruising all over. But the fight was not over yet.

“How dare you?” Harry screamed at Ron, Percy and Ginny and the three of them saw why he was feared and respected. Harry even with all these injuries was leaking so much magic and power it was frightening. The Slytherins who had gone up to rest had come back at the noise of the screaming and yelling and everyone was looking at the stand off between the two formerly best friends.

“How dare you say all this against your parents?” Harry screamed again.

“Do you know what it is to be without them? How difficult? If my parents or Sirius were here for me from when I was a baby do you think my magic would have been bound or they would have allowed Dumbledore, Moody or you three to plot against me and kill me off?” Harry shouted loudly, glaring at them.

Harry turned and suddenly dragged Arran forward, “This is Arran Lestrangle and he gave me the secret of the wards around his home so that I could kill his parents and grandparents and do you know he is a billionaire Ron. Draco Malfoy allowed Amelia Bones to kill his father and you know how rich he is. All of them here,” Harry swept his hands at the Slytherins, “are so rich, so rich that the money you have been taking from Dumbledore is not even equal to their pocket change.”

Ron flushed and tried to sneer defiantly at Harry, “But they were not blessed to have parents like yours. Yeah so your parents got you second hand stuff and your dad did not lick Fudge’s boots like Percy and work his way up the ladder. BIG DEAL Ron! What you don’t

realize is that they love you; they would protect you with their lives and would have died for you without another thought DAMMIT! You are PATHETIC Ron and I really don't know how you were born in this lovely family. Do you know how many times I have wished for my parents to be there for me like yours was there for you? How much I envied you for your family? How jealous I was?" Harry's voice broke there and it was a minute before he continued in that horrifying silence.

"How could you say that your parents are not worthy? How *dare* you say that? What do you know of unworthy parents Ron? Do you know how the kids of unworthy parents really suffer? Do you really have any idea? *I know Ron* and it is not pretty because *I broke those families last night* and made all these out here orphans and you dare talk like this about yours? DAMN YOU, damn you Ron, damn you, damn you," Harry's voice slowly toned down and he sank to his knees and hid his face in his hands that were shaking very badly.

Snape and Arran who were blinking their eyes furiously to stop the tears that would not listen to them and gathered Harry into their arms; most of the Slytherins there were crying and Ron for the first time realized he had gone too far in saying all the harsh things that he had said in his rage.

Snape wiped his eyes angrily and taking out his wand slowly began healing Harry. Ginny did the same with Ron, seeing no one was coming near him. Snape rolled a small bottle of healing salve towards her and she blushed through her tears as she took it and applied it on Ron and Percy and then on her swollen cheek.

There would be no forgiveness and no reconciliation she knew. Ron was feeling devastated and he looked around at the others to see all of them crying, Harry's emotions getting to all of them. The Slytherins silently went up to their rooms and stayed there.

The Weasleys were standing there, tears streaming down their eyes too astounded to take all this in; they could not believe their son's opinion of them.

The mood in Grimmauld Place was very sad and full of despair and added to that the depth of Harry's grief had mixed with his magic and

it affected everyone in that room who were already very sad, taut and stressed out.

No one spoke anything after that out burst. Snape had Harry almost on his lap and was slowly stroking his head and trying to calm him down. Arran was sitting with Snape and holding on to Harry's hands tightly and was muttering softly, "Not your fault Harry" over and over again.

Molly Weasley was totally distraught and distressed and Arthur was shriveling inside with the words of his youngest son ringing in his ears. His two sons and daughter thought him a failure as a father and as a person. That thought kept going round and round in his head and he leaned on Charlie and held on to him as if he was going to die and Charlie was his last hope.

The rest of the Weasleys were simply blown away by the accusations of Ron and Harry's words in response that almost hit them in their gut. Even Snape had not realized the depth of Harry's feelings and the guilt he had been harboring for instigating the attacks the night before.

There was only silence in Grimmauld Place that evening and Ron finally realized his jealousy had taken him to a place from where there could be no return.

End of Chapter – 34

Chapter – 35

The silence stretched endlessly at Grimmauld Place before there was a sharp crack.

“Master Snape, Master Draco and Master Bill are awake.” Dobby who had popped up from Godric's Hollow told them and all of them except Blaise and Pansy apparated to Godric's Hollow.

“Blaise, Pansy, both of you be here just in case the other Slytherins want anything and I will ask the Twins and Charlie to come here in a few minutes and be with you alright?” Arran asked them and they nodded glaring at Ron and Ginny.

“Please what is wrong with Bill?” Ginny's voice came very softly just when Arran was about to apparate away.

“He was hurt by Bellatrix Lestrange and was in a healing coma until now.” Arran told her and not waiting for her answer apparated away to Godric's Hollow.

Pansy and Blaise glared at Ginny and turned away and sat down to wait for news about Draco and Bill.

Harry was looking a bit better after Snape's administrations but was feeling miserable inside. He could not even imagine the betrayal he had felt at Ron's speech. Of all people he had called Arthur Weasley a failure, a man who stood so tall and lived by his very strict moral code, all because his father did not have the bloody galleons to buy new clothes for the git that was his son.

Snape and Arran had not left his side and after they came to Godric's Hollow they went down silently to the basement where Draco and Bill were. Both of them had woken up and Harry hung back as the Weasleys crowded around him.

Ria had run to Draco who was groaning slightly and seeing her he smiled. Arran left Harry to check up on Draco and Harry removed Snape's hand that was holding him tightly and pushed him forward.

"Go and check up on them. I will be in the living room Sev. If they see me like this they will ask questions I cannot face right now." he told him softly and not waiting for an answer ran up.

Snape saw him run up and went to Bill and ran his wand and found he was fine. He summoned the necessary potions and gave it to Molly and went to Draco and repeated the same, handing his potions to Ria.

Arran had already checked Draco and was now running his wand over Remus who was still sleeping. Snape came to him and both of them saw that he was still in a healing coma, though his vitals were now functioning better and both of them went up not waiting for anyone else.

The Weasleys were with Bill though they were very silent and in a few minutes after the potions were given, and both Bill and Draco were sleeping, all of them trooped up utterly defeated by the events of the evening.

Harry was there sitting on the ground with Snape and Arran sitting on either side of him. Hermione who had been very silent after shouting at Ron was sitting opposite Harry looking as miserable as all of them felt. Hearing the Weasleys coming up Harry flushed. "Mr. Weasley I am sorry to have hit Ron and Percy."

Molly sat down in front of Harry and pulled him into a bone crushing hug. "Once more I hear you apologizing for Ron's mistakes, I will hex you." Tears rolled down her eyes, "We will not discuss them now Harry. We still have to face You-Know-Who. We will finish that before we tackle them."

"They have made their positions very clear Harry. If it weren't for the fact these kids will be publicly shamed if I disowned them, I would have done so today. It is very clear they do not want to be part of the Weasley family and are ashamed of the Weasley name. Good luck to them. This is the way I am and I am afraid I cannot change my

principles for anybody, not even my children who see me as a failure both as a father and as a man.” Arthur was very bitter and very clear of his stance.

“Why should we change dad? We have done nothing. If anyone has to change today I would say it is those three, Voldemort and Dumbledore. With such a mindset I cannot even blame Dumbledore for leading them astray.” Charlie said furiously his voice very tight.

“Come Harry, I am going to give you a dreamless sleep potion and I will not listen to any arguments.” Snape told him and looking around he continued, “I think all of us should have a dose of the sleeping potion. We have to be fresh for tomorrow. We cannot let these emotions affect us now when we are so close to winning tomorrow. Come on all of you. We will talk after tomorrow.”

Arran sent Charlie and the Twins who were very silent now-a-days to Grimmauld Place to be with Pansy and Blaise to avoid trouble and McGonagall also offered to go with them as a precaution.

Harry was asleep in two minutes and Snape and Arran went to the basement to keep watch on the sleeping patients there. They came down from Harry’s room deeply disturbed and were about to go to the basement when James called out to Snape from his portrait. All the three of them had witnessed the horrible scene at Grimmauld Place and Harry had not even looked up at them and the sorrow etched in his face made James, Sirius and Lily want to kill Ron, Percy and Ginny.

The way Harry had cried out from the bottom of his heart of how much he had lost because his parents and Sirius were not there for him when he was young had made them cry once again, a cry in frustration, a frustration that they could do nothing for their child.

“Severus?” James now called to Snape and both Snape and Arran stopped on their way to the basement.

“How is Harry?” Lily asked him anxiously.

“Fine Lily. He should be alright tomorrow. He will be.” Snape told her trying to reassure him self at the same time.

“How could that boy say those words?” Sirius raged, “How upstanding Arthur is and much Harry has gone through, can Ron not see it, the git. He was so cruel today the jealous pig.”

“Yes but it is okay Black. Harry will be fine once we get through safely tomorrow and put all this behind us. It is not as if he has to interact with Weasley and his sister on a daily basis as he did this year. Now there will be no pretending and no acting. It will be alright.” Snape told them and went down.

James, Sirius and Lily were not convinced but they did not say anything more. It was imperative Harry, Snape, Arran and the others kept their cool for one more day and so they did not argue or curse Ron more as they dearly wanted to.

Harry woke up late the next day and wondered why he was feeling so tense and very sad. The next minute he remembered and turned around and slumped face first into his pillow.

After sometime Harry slowly got up, washed and put on the special robe Snape and Arran had been making for him. They had bought a lovely forest green robe made of dragon hide that had already been charmed to stay feather light always at Madame Malkins.

Then Snape and Arran had got to work. They had chanted the ancient magic and placed layer by layer of protective spells and had locked them in. This would protect Harry from most of the ordinary spells and even a few dark ones.

Then they set to placing many protective spells against Dark Arts, Blood Magic and Black Magic. So Harry would be protected by the basic spells and a few nasty ones of the Dark and Black Magic. Harry him self had placed a lot of protection spells against Parcel Magic and he had also spelled his wand against the summoning charm.

Snape had made a trip to the Potter’s vault, (he was able to do so because Harry had keyed in both Snape and Arran into the wards of the vault after he made them sole beneficiaries to the Potter and Black fortunes) and had brought many wands and had made Harry

choose the most compatible wand. Harry had chosen one that had been most comfortable for him. That wand happened to be that of his grandfather Harold Potter and Snape had also spelled that against the summoning charm and had bound that wand to Harry just like his own wand.

Now Harry wore that robe and fastened his two wand holsters and placed his wands in both of them and tried experimentally a few times to check if they were smooth and satisfied about their quickness to fall into his hands and then went down.

Snape and Arran and indeed all the other Weasleys were up and early and in fact though Harry did not know it, Snape and Arran had not gone to bed at all, making a great many preparations. Arran had left with Charlie, Ria and Moody well before lunch to prepare a huge dome at Hogwarts. Arran had looked at the School but had declined Dumbledore's invitation to look around saying he would wait until Harry would have the time to show him around.

They had along with Dumbledore, McGonagall and Charlie who had come from Grimmauld Place and Amelia Bones from the Ministry had been working hard to create shields and also wards to make sure that the killing curse would not go through them and into the crowd that had already started gathering at the gates since yesterday.

Now the lines stretched as far as Hogsmeade and more and more people were pouring in. Arran and Ria were heavily disguised and they created walls made of conjured stone and locked them into place. Then he made the stones see – through thus allowing the crowds to be able to see through them.

The killing curses and the dark curses would bounce off the stones and shatter them and Arran solved the problem of repairing them instantly by making Dumbledore call the magic of Hogwarts herself, so that they would be replaced that very instant so that the next killing curse would not hit the spectators and they would be protected and the dueling arena completely enclosed and covered.

The Quidditch pitch itself was enlarged to three times its size to allow Harry and Voldemort to have the necessary space for dueling.

Apparition wards were removed inside the dueling arena so that the opponents could apparate to escape a curse if they wanted to.

The whole process of warding took almost three hours to complete and then the crowds were let in and were allowed to sit all around the pitch where the stands had been modified into larger ones that completely encircled the pitch.

Harry in the meantime had gone to lunch and found Draco, Bill and Snape there. He smiled at his parents and Sirius and hugged Snape and Hermione and stopped when he saw a rather weak Draco and Bill sitting there.

"Hey guys how are you both?" he asked them.

"Great Harry, only sore." Draco said and Bill nodded tiredly.

Snape pushed Harry on to the sofa and asked Dobby to bring him food. Hermione came and sat close to him holding the plate Dobby brought with one hand and holding Harry's arm with her another arm.

Harry smiled and he ate in silence and relaxed completely leaning his head on Hermione's shoulder. All of them sat in silence until Arran and Ria came back. Ria squealed to see Draco awake and then slowly the Weasleys came in. Moody and McGonagall came in to wish Harry and then left for Grimmauld Place to be with the Slytherins there. They would join Arthur and those going to Hogwarts later.

At a quarter to five Harry stood up and took the portkey that Arran had brought with him and hugged Arran, Snape and then turned to Hermione. He had not spoken at all and the others had not forced him to.

"See you later Hermione." Harry told her and slowly leaned in and kissed her on her lips softly for the first time.

"Be safe and return to us Harry." She told him trembling and smiling with difficulty through her tears.

"Take care Harry and be sure to return." Arran told him in a voice that was not quite steady and he hugged him fiercely.

Harry smiled and looked long at Sirius and then at his parents and turning to Snape he hugged him once more, "Thanks for everything Sev."

"Oh no you don't." Snape told him shakily. "You come back here and thank me after Voldemort is gone. Now I will not accept anything from you. Take care Harry." Snape kissed him on his forehead and then Harry stepped back and disappeared.

Snape sank to his knees.

"He will be alright Severus." Hermione told him softly. "You just see, Harry will come back victorious."

No one answered and all of them sat down for the long wait.

Harry had portkeyed to Hogwarts five minutes before Voldemort would come there and he saw almost the entire Wizarding World in the stands. A loud cheer started when they noticed Harry in the middle of the pitch and Harry simply stood there waiting for Voldemort to arrive. Harry himself could not hear the cheers because Arran had placed the whole pitch under the silencing charm and had also added privacy charms so that no one from the crowd would be able to hear the conversation between Harry and Voldemort if there was any.

He smiled and gave a small wave to the people seated there. He saw the Weasleys and Ron and Ginny and Percy seated there also. McGonagall had told him Mr. Weasley had insisted so that they could see just what Harry was against and by binding his powers how much of damage they could have done. They were seated slightly apart from the other Weasleys and looked very tense.

Dumbledore and his Order were also having front seats with the best members of the auror force in the front. There was another group of aurors patrolling the rear and there were very wide pathways so that in case Voldemort brought dementors or vampires the aurors from the front could reach behind and defend.

If Voldemort would bring any creature with him into the arena, then Harry's portkey would take him back to Godric's Hollow and Harry had decided to call for the life debt.

Ten minutes later there was another person in the arena with Harry and the crowds stilled.

The most hated and feared person in the Wizarding World had arrived.

Lord Voldemort

He was also wearing shimmering robes of green and stood tall and confident. He was smiling nastily and his red eyes were gleaming with an emotion of superiority and something else that Harry could not quite understand.

Hello Harry Potter, good evening." He smirked at Harry who inclined his head but did not answer back. Harry had his wand in his hand already and was so alert he was quivering.

"Good evening Voldemort." Harry replied.

"I realize I will be killed here one way or another, so I have decided to take you with me when I go. *Avada kedavra.*"

A sickening green light sped towards Harry who conjured a snake to take it for him and pulling a shield wandlessly, he cast his first curse at Voldemort right on the heels of the killing curse not answering Voldemort's statement about taking him down with him.

"*Parsa boila parsas,*" Harry called in a clear and firm voice and not waiting cast the stunner right after.

Voldemort dodged the first one and threw up a shield for the second.

"*Shyekiars,*" Voldemort hissed in Parseltongue, a curse that would break all the joints.

Harry threw up a shield and when the curse broke through it, apparated to the side to avoid it, which he did narrowly and fired a

blood boiling curse at Voldemort and followed that by a blood seeping curse. Voldemort easily banished it and sent his compliments with three killing curses that made Harry apparate and jump as he sent the next curse rolling on the ground from the third killing curse.

"Mindus boggatus," screamed Harry and a boggart sped towards Voldemort, a boggart that would attack the mind. Voldemort banished it with ease and then sent his own curse.

Then the real fight started. The above spells were a warm up to gauge the opponent and now both Harry and Voldemort knew that they were pretty equally matched. Harry had more raw power while Voldemort had far more experience and extensive knowledge of the Dark Arts and Blood Magic and black magic spells. And so the fight began in earnest.

Voldemort was very nimble on his feet and he ran and jumped and shielded just like Bellatrix had two days back and Harry was astounded that at this age Voldemort was able to run and roll as he did.

And run and roll and apparated here and there both of them did with the breathless crowd who had their hearts in their mouth following the sickening flashes of green, red, orange, blue and white flashing fierce and fast from the opponents.

An hour into the duel Harry started using both his wand and his left hand for continuous spell casting.

Voldemort was amazed at the power Harry was exhibiting and now could understand how he defeated Bellatrix. Harry was now throwing killing curses left, right and center as well, though he was way ahead of Harry getting one killing curse to every third curse.

Harry invariably conjured a target or rolled over just like he did and he had even tried to aim the curse a little off so that he may get Harry as he rolled over to avoid but until now Harry had rolled over successfully as he.

But it was tiring and as time went by both the opponents was frustrated. Harry's raw power was keeping him standing and his

reflexes were saving him from the curses that broke his shield or the killing curse that could penetrate any shield.

"Arrowsus bardutidus," hissed Voldemort and a stream of sharp pointed poisoned arrows screamed towards Harry who hurriedly levitated himself up in the air and the arrows screeched and smashed and shattered into the walls almost totally destroying the wall and all the people who were sitting where the arrows smashed screamed and there was a minor stampede as all of them tried to run back.

From above even as he jumped down and rolled out of the way of a killing curse that came towards him Harry whispered, *"Serpensortia"* and conjured an anaconda that looked just like Nagini. Voldemort screamed when he saw Harry conjure his familiar who had died and cast a powerful *crucio* that just missed Harry by a whisper and smashed behind.

Harry was tempted to conjure a basilisk but held back because he was not sure Voldemort would get the idea and conjure one himself if he managed to banish Harry's away.

Harry rolled away from the *cruciatus* that missed him by a whisper and shouted a blood freezing charm at Voldemort who jumped out of the way in anger.

Outside the crowds were being treated to a fight that if it weren't so serious and if their fate and that of their world had not depended upon the fate of the winner, would have been enthralled and would have enjoyed it far better. Now they were watching with their hearts in their mouths and praying that Harry Potter would win and if he did die, please, please he would take the evil down with him.

All those on Harry's side were terrified and were watching the fight progress without either opponent giving an inch. But they could not do anything and Arthur and the others watching in the arena had their earrings turned off because they had not wanted any conversation that they may be forced to have with others who were with them disturb Harry.

Those in Godric's Hollow were terrified. They had heard Voldemort's comments and Snape had almost stopped breathing. Voldemort was

going to do what Harry had planned to do to him, if Voldemort had not sent the letter about the horcrux and the horcrux itself.

They did not talk and communicate with the others in the room; all of them had heard it and Hermione had had to press her hand hard against her mouth to stop gaping aloud or shrieking in terror. Arran had gripped the arms of the chair he had been sitting in so tightly he was fast losing circulation in his arms.

Snape did not dare say anything, there was the portkey that would bring Harry away when injured above a certain level but the portkey would work if he got in the way of a deadly curse that would render him dead. Snape shivered and brought his arms around, tightly hugging himself.

They had been sitting there for more than three hours now and Snape, Arran and the others had yet to even shift a little from their places let alone move.

Ron, Ginny and Percy were terrified at the duel, no the battle they were witnessing.

Ron remembered his father's very cold words to him before they were given a portkey to Hogwarts.

"This is a portkey that will take you three to your seats at Hogwarts to watch Harry and Voldemort duel. If only Harry's powers had been released before now, Sirius would not have died. Please think on that. You told me he was always rushing into situations. Yes that is true and Harry has, not listening to any of us has rushed into this duel with Voldemort swearing that while he will do his utmost to kill Voldemort, if he fails, he will using his magic will at least take him down with him and save all of us who certainly do not deserve his sacrifice."

"Father," Percy had begun.

"What is it Percy? Surely you are not going to suggest Harry's power being bound for this duel also are you?" Arthur had dripped ice and had left abruptly.

Now three hours into the duel and Percy, Ron and Ginny were beginning to understand the level of betrayal they had indulged in by listening to the Headmaster. And they had not budged in their stance even when they were found out. They looked at Harry, each of them shaking inside at the fierce battle taking place, a battle that would continue until one or both of them died.

Ron at that time shook with a terrific intensity as he saw Harry screaming curses though he could not hear them and he saw Harry rolling and jumping and twisting in the horrible fight that was still taking place inside the Quidditch pitch. He realized at that time that only if Harry had this power trained properly he could have saved Sirius. His father had been right.

Ron shriveled inside. He had joined out of jealousy and the money had been a great motivator. But he had lost everything and now though his father was the Minister for Magic, Percy was an outcast in the new Ministry because he had allied with Fudge, and he and Ginny would never be able to lift their heads and walk proudly because they were the Minister's children.

Now the Weasleys had the name, the fame and so much of an increase in money; all the things he had accused his father of not providing, and today his father had been more than man enough for the whole of the Wizarding World only he and Ginny would have to sit out permanently. Two tears ran down his cheeks that fortunately for him no one noticed because they were watching the duel, not that he cared at the time.

He had truly lost. He had lost the money he craved because he knew he would not enjoy spending it, the name he had wanted, the glory he dreamed of, everything. He had thought he was having the upper hand by earning the money doing important and trusted work for the Headmaster and the Order of the Phoenix; but all that was changed.

Now his father was the Minister, Dumbledore was a hair's breath from Azkaban like him and Ginny and he was ostracized from his family for the rest of his life.

Ron cried aloud and wept in despair wishing he could go back and undo the past but no one heard him and no one cared.

Meanwhile the duel went on intense and furious.

"Juniakduew," whispered Harry and a huge stream of boiling oil sprouted off Voldemort who rushed aside and returned the favor and cast the same curse at Harry.

Harry banished the oil much to Voldemort's chagrin and re-cast the same curse again only making it a multiple curse.

"Multiplexio Juniakduew," he hissed in Parseltongue and hit Voldemort for the first time as several thin streams of the boiling oil sped towards him. Voldemort banished it but got a small portion of it on his left arm and he screamed.

"Multiplexio avada kedavra," he shouted and the crowds gasped as almost twelve killing curses rushed to choke Harry. All of them were amazed. While no one could hear they could see the green of the killing curse and they were horrified. No one until then knew that even killing curses could be cast in multiples.

They could be cast but the power to do so was immense and caster suffered a great loss of power. Voldemort was so incensed that he had been hit first that he had cast the same multiple curse only he made it the killing curse in anger. They were now in the third hour of dueling and both of them were sweating and very much tired.

Voldemort staggered with the effort of casting multiple killing curses was pretty confident he had killed off Harry Potter whichever way he rolled, but Harry seeing the multiple curses had fallen flat on the ground letting the curse hit and shatter the wards behind him.

Voldemort in his confidence had let his concentration waver for a minute and so he was unprepared when Harry fell flat on the ground escaping the curses. He screamed and raised his wand, but the momentary loss of concentration was enough for Harry who hit him with the *cruciatius* from the ground.

Harry got the first curse to hit Voldemort after nearly three hours of duel square on his chest and he slowly got up keeping the curse on the screaming, writhing Voldemort, not wanting to let go of the advantage. He kept the curse on Voldemort for a good three minutes

before he took out his second wand and hit Voldemort with the freezing charm twice and simultaneously removing the cruciatus.

Then the next moment he cast magical binds binding Voldemort's magic so that he could not access it and curse Harry wandlessly.

Voldemort looked at him with deep hatred and struggled mentally to overcome the binds and also the freezing charm. But with his magic bound he had no chance and he looked contemptuously at Harry waiting for him to kill him. He snarled inside watching Harry malevolently with his red eyes. He had placed an exploding charm that would trigger the moment he died in any way. He would explode and Harry would also die with him.

He had contemplated getting killed to the first killing curse Harry had thrown but his ego would not let him and he wanted to actually finish off Harry in a duel and assert his superiority. Otherwise no one would respect him when he would be resurrected to his body once again. So he had not fallen prey to the first curse Harry had thrown but had fought a real wizard's duel.

And he had lost. He was very bitter but the fact Harry would die the moment he would cast the killing curse on him was keeping him erect and proud.

He would triumph at any cost. He looked without any expression at Harry, daring Harry to kill him.

But Harry had a very different idea. He did not know about Voldemort's plan. But he knew about the Wizarding World and he was not going to be labeled a murderer or the next Dark Lord just because he happened to bring this one down. He would keep himself safe.

That plan was only reconfirmed when Voldemort told him he was planning to do what Harry had planned only the day before. Harry was also suspicious of any magic backlash that Voldemort would trigger off if he did kill him and so he had put this plan into shape as he was rolling and casting curses and fighting with him, literally thinking off his feet.

He had learned the magic that Arran and Snape had used on Rabastan and that was what he was going to do now. But before that he would defeat Voldemort completely.

Harry cast a small privacy spell, "Sev, Arran, destroy the horcrux and portkey the ring please and I am fine." And canceling the privacy spell looked at Voldemort and smiled at him.

Snape and Arran though not understanding what Harry was planning to do moved for the first time since the battle started. They got up and hurried shaking with sheer nerves to the basement where the ring horcrux was.

Harry, seeing Voldemort beginning to struggle, bound more tightly and tied up almost all of Voldemort's magic making him feel very faint and then removed the freezing charm up to his neck. He walked up to the helpless Dark Lord and picked up his wand and slipped it into his pocket. Then using his wand he conjured two chairs and levitated Voldemort into one chair, conjured ropes and bound Voldemort to his chair and sat on the other.

The crowds were now going berserk and as did not understand what was happening inside. Arthur Weasley cast a sonorous charm and shouted to the crowds to behave and threatened to clear the stands and hearing that the crowds fell silent and looked intently at the two inside wishing that they could somehow hear what the Boy-who-Lived was saying to the Dark Lord. Arthur and the others in Harry's side who were there in the stands activated their earrings softly.

The Boy-who-Lived was smiling very nastily at the Dark Lord.

"Voldemort you have been defeated completely and utterly defeated. Today my parents and all those who died at your hands will be avenged. I have destroyed all your horcruxes, yes Voldemort I have and I will soon destroy you, oh not by killing you but in a far worse way."

"Kill me if you dare Potter. I dare you to. Coward. I know you can't." Voldemort told him with disdain.

Harry laughed a sound that chilled Voldemort to his bones.

"I will show you Voldie baby," Harry told him unconsciously borrowing Arran's phrases. "I will. Just bear with me for a few minutes alright?" Harry told him mockingly.

Voldemort sneered. "Kill me Potter and be done with it."

"You know Voldemort, I told you in my letter that Snape is my man. You are such a fool."

Voldemort snarled but he went cold inside. He looked fearfully at Harry for a second before that emotion was masked and his red eyes gleamed with hatred.

"We will soon know who is loyal to whom Harry Potter. I will return. You may be rest assured that Snape is loyal to me."

"Hmm, I will have to provide you with proof before you will believe me I think. Now you must know what I am going to do to you Voldemort. I am going to remove your magic and then I will turn you over to the Ministry of Magic for research. They will poke and prod you for a while like they did with Rabastan and then the new Minister for Magic would give the order for you to be put down like a rabid dog.

"And the best thing is I will not be persecuted for that as ancient magic is not dark magic. I will not even kill you. I will destroy you."

Voldemort screamed.

At that time a portkey landed and Harry picked up the box and Voldemort fainted in shock when he recognized the box in which he had sent the ring.

"Enervate," Harry said with a smile and he saw Voldemort awake and looking at him with terror in his eyes.

"This is how your victims felt when you killed them Voldie baby. I am glad and hope you have begun to realize that what goes around comes around. But enough of that let us move on."

Harry opened the box and took out the elegant ring of Godric Gryffindor and placed it on his finger and looked at Voldemort.

Voldemort was sweating and he was reeking of the fear that showed plainly in his eyes.

“Severus is mine Voldemort and I belong to him. He has become the father you destroyed sixteen years ago.”

Voldemort trembled inside at the betrayal he had suffered as he processed Harry’s words and understood them. No more horcruxes and Potter was the one who knew ancient magic. His lips trembled and he looked up at Harry Potter.

“Arran Lestrage, Ria, Draco Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson and Blaise Zabini along with Severus, McGonagall and Hermione Granger first joined together to fight against you and Albus Dumbledore. It was Arran, Snape and all of us who destroyed the horcruxes at Ravenclaw’s castle and at the Gaunt’s place. Arran was the one who captured Pettigrew and using ancient magic saved me when I was captured by you. We have been working together since then.

“After many months we added the Weasleys and still later, the Longbottoms, Remus Lupin, Amelia Bones and her deputy Brian Wheeler.”

Voldemort looked numb with shock at all that he was hearing. Arran had betrayed him? Why? If he could love anyone, he would have loved Arran. Why did he betray him? His confusion was apparent in his face because Harry continued.

“What have you done for them Voldemort? You have only made sure they were fugitives and would be imprisoned without a trial if apprehended. But let me continue. Three days before School ended last year, almost all the Slytherins approached me saying that they wanted out of you pretty little organization, because all you were doing was only killing, raping, torturing and then killing and on and on and on.

“I accepted all of them and assured them that I will help them. I waited to become legally adult and started the war from my side. All these kids gave me the secret of the wards and the Slytherins also helped to open and nullify the wards just before the attacks.

“Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler killed Lucius Malfoy, I killed Bellatrix, Arran killed Alecko, Draco, Pansy, Blaise, McGonagall, Mrs. Longbottom, Hermione and Neville along with the Weasleys took out the Inner and the Outer Circles. We simply killed all of them. Sev, Remus, Bill Weasley and I killed all the Lestranges and Fenrir.

“Now it is your time. You will be killed by Order of the Minister and you will die knowing that you are all alone and no one except the few madmen and women who have already died to pay their dues to the society they tried so much to harm. All of them are dead Voldemort. You will join them too. Goodbye. It was not nice knowing you.” Harry threw Voldemort’s words back at him and then stepped back.

Harry took out Voldemort’s wand and looking at him, broke it into two pieces. Voldemort screamed again. Harry removed the binds on his magic and simultaneously cast three more freezing charms ensuring that Voldemort would not escape while he was chanting. Now Voldemort could not even move his head and he looked at Harry his red eyes full of fear.

He knew Harry was saying something mentally some spell of the ancient magic. But only one thing went through Voldemort’s mind as he lay there helpless waiting to be ripped off his magic and life.

Not his death eaters, not the bitter and horrible fact that he master wizard had lost to the boy who had just turned seventeen, not that his cause was totally lost, not that Arran, Snape and all those he had thought were truly his were traitors, not the deaths of the truly loyal ones, not the fact that the Wizarding World was witnessing his most mortifying moment.

He was going to DIE. He had worked so hard all his life to live and live forever, had taken so many precautions but here he was going to die and he was going to die, die, die, and die. Voldemort cried in fear of death and tears fell out of his red eyes as he pathetically beseeched Harry with his eyes because he could not move anything else.

HARRY POTTER! Save me from death His mind cried out piteously. Oh Great Goddess! Oh Mother of all! Please help me. I don’t want to die. Please Harry Potter I swear on my magic I will be on your side, I

will listen to all that you say, I will be your man, I will never kill anyone, I will love you like your father and mother, please don't kill me, I will never think of harming Hogwarts, she is my home, I swear to you I will not harm her, please don't kill me, please do NOT kill me POTTERRRRRR, was the last scream in Voldemort's mind and then he knew no more. He crumpled and then he lay still.

While Voldemort was hyperventilating, Harry started chanting mentally the piece of ancient magic he had learned from Snape and Arran. The chant took three minutes to finish and Harry drew his wand and pointed it at Voldemort who had been looking at him with his eyes watering and totally terrorized and said quietly.

"Senthalipuramalikathasa masserthasa kalikalamutahkalitha sampramathe" Harry chanted the locking spell and locked the magic in place and removed the freezing charms from him. Voldemort crumpled and then he lay still, held by the ropes that bound him to his chair.

A roar went up in the crowd when they saw Voldemort crumpling and all of them stood up and started clapping and then raised their wands and the sky sparkled with so much color that was a sight to behold.

Harry smiled tiredly feeling drained inside. He had made Voldemort like Rabastan Lestrage. Voldemort's magic was removed from his body and left him almost dead.

Harry had won the war with Voldemort.

He turned to the crowds and bowed tiredly. He bowed in all four directions, cancelled the silencing charms inside and heard the roar and held his wand to his neck. *'Sonorous'* he whispered.

"Please calm down all of you," his voice appealed loudly to everyone.

The crowd went totally silent in a minute.

"Voldemort is defeated. He has been defeated by means of the use of ancient magic, the magic of our forefathers. I have removed the magic from him and fed it to Hogwarts. He will never be able to harm anyone using his magic ever again. I now turn him over to the

Ministry of Magic to do what they wish with him. I am very tired and please excuse me. I will meet all of you here in Hogwarts in a week's time and talk to you. Thank you."

Harry activated the portkey and went back to Godric's Hollow, to Snape, Arran and Hermione.

End of Chapter – 35

Chapter – 36

Harry portkeyed back to Godric's Hollow extremely tired and exhausted to find a weeping Snape, a sobbing Hermione and a silently crying Arran and everyone else trembling and brushing their eyes and sniffing. He was amazed and then alarmed. No one had noticed him and he became very worried.

“Hey are all of you alright?” he asked softly walking into the room.

There was a loud squeal and Hermione ran and fell on him. Snape and Arran were still sitting and standing there respectively though Arran was wiping his eyes and grinning weakly at him striding towards him. Snape was still on the floor and after he heard Harry's voice, had bent down and was struggling to collect himself.

Hermione smothered him with kisses, “You came back safely Harry, you came back.” She kept repeating in between kissing him all over his face.

Harry was taken aback at this obvious display of affection but he decided it was fantastic and hoped she wouldn't stop. A few seconds later he grabbed her face in between his hands and brought his head down and kissed her deeply and then again and then again.

Hermione had calmed down at the first kiss and was participating in the second and the third kiss blew her mind away, according to her. He released her not blushing for the first time and extremely satisfied for some strange reason to see her blush furiously.

He stepped back and went to Snape and sat next to him. Arran followed Harry and hugged him fiercely grinning a bit strongly now and was holding on to Harry tightly.

“Severus?”

Snape leaped on Harry and hugged him burying his face in Harry's shoulder. “Am silly.” He mumbled, “Just a release of all this tension. Will be fine Harry.” He said holding on to Harry for dear life. He had

broken down the moment Harry had called him the father he had lost and his emotions and stress had run away with him and could not get him self to stop.

He had been so scared that Harry would die because Voldemort would somehow trigger off a magical backlash, the relief Harry had survived made him very shaky. Now after holding on to Harry for sometime Snape calmed down and then lifted his head from Harry's shoulder and smiled tremulously at him.

Harry grinned back and turned to look at his parents and Sirius and smiled. "Your deaths and indeed everyone's at the hands of Voldemort has been avenged mum, dad, Sirius." He said softly blinking his eyes furiously as he watched the unmistakable pride shining in his parents' eyes. They couldn't talk to save their lives and they looked at their son with so much of pride. "Show us baby." James asked him feeling very emotional.

Molly, and all the others who were at Hogwarts portkeyed to Godric's Hollow the moment Harry left. Only Arthur, Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler remained along with Moody, Shacklebolt and Tonks to take care of Voldemort.

All of them hugged Harry and there were many relieved sighs. Molly would not let him go for quite a while and McGonagall was weeping unashamedly on his shoulder.

Mrs. Longbottom was trembling with relief and she shook his hand very fiercely and Neville simply crushed him.

Luna and her father stood there and simply beamed at him.

Draco whose eyes were shining with tears pulled Harry close and the three Slytherins joined in a group hug.

"You have saved us Potter. You have saved us." Draco started and the tears spilled out of his eyes and all of them whispered those words over and over again.

"You were the ones who showed me how to Draco. I could have never ever done all this without all of you." Harry said wiping Draco's eyes away.

The Weasleys were laughing in delight though their laughter was tempered by strong emotions of their family war and the Twins and Charlie hugged Harry and blinked furiously.

"We can never repay you,"

"I will hex you if you speak a word more." Harry threatened and hugged them back. "I will tell you what your mum told me. Don't you dare apologize for them. The fault is theirs. Not yours." Bill and Draco looked at each other in confusion. What had happened?

Harry turned and summoned a pensieve and removed his memories of the fight and tapped it. All of them saw it with a thrill combined with a good amount of fear. Pansy and Blaise had come back from Grimmauld Place to wait for Harry half way during the duel because they could not bear to be alone.

They saw the whole duel and Lily screamed when she heard Voldemort's opening words and James and Sirius understood why Snape had looked as if he was dying. They saw Voldemort crying with disbelief and heard Harry's words to the Wizarding World before he took the portkey back to Godric's Hollow. Snape, Hermione and Arran sat close to Harry and all three of them slowly came back to normal.

"Harry you must sleep now and indeed all of us must. Arran and I did not sleep at all last night and now I am very tired. We will talk tomorrow." Snape told a very agreeable Harry.

Hearing a chorus of yes from all of them Snape continued, "Minerva can you call Albus to remain at Hogwarts tomorrow. We will meet with him and the Board tomorrow over dinner. Harry and all of us here are going to sleep and we will awake and come over to Hogwarts as soon as possible."

Then Snape activated his earring and spoke into it. "Amelia can you go along to Grimmauld Place with either Minerva or Arthur and send

the Slytherins home safely telling them Harry will get in touch with them later and meet with them?" McGonagall nodded in agreement.

"Will do all this and don't worry Severus, I will make sure the Slytherins are not touched in any way and they are sent to their homes safely. Is Harry awake or is he already in his bed Severus?"

"Yes Mrs. Bones, I am awake and fine." Harry managed to reply before everyone who was listening screamed their relief at Harry returning safe and sound.

Arthur and Amelia Bones and Brian Wheeler spoke to him but did not come over because they were with Voldemort who was being checked by the unspeakables.

Snape pushed Harry to his room and grinning at Neville and Hermione and waving dramatically to the others Harry went to his room where Snape pointed to the bathroom. Harry stuck his tongue out and went to have a hot bath that made his sore muscles feel so much better.

Snape was waiting and he snapped his fingers and Dobby came, his eyes watering, "The great Harry Potter has defeated the Dark Lord. Harry Potter is great and Dobby is proud to be the great wizard's elf." The little elf screamed making Snape wince and Harry grin.

"Thanks Dobby." He told it and sat on his bed and polished off the meal and then accepted Snape's Dreamless Sleep potion and in three seconds he was out like a light.

Snape bent down and kissed his forehead and pushed the untidy and still not completely dry hair from his face and went down with a spring in his steps.

All the others were waiting for him and then one by one they left and Hermione, Snape, Arran, Bill, Draco, Ria, Pansy and Blaise went to sleep. Before they slept Arran, Draco, Ria and Snape went to Malfoy Manor to meet with Narcissa.

Voldemort died on an Order given directly by the Minister for Magic at midnight that night. The unspeakables could find nothing there the same as was in the case of Rabastan and so Amelia Bones formally requested the Minister to write an Order to execute. Everyone at Godric's Hollow was sleeping and the death eaters at the Ministry were already in Azkaban, their trials having been over swiftly when Voldemort died.

They had been asked about their allegiance and also names of everyone they knew were death eaters. All the Slytherins and also those on Harry's side were not harmed even when their parents revealed their names under veritaserum.

All the Slytherins had been set free by special Order of the Wizengamot and were praised for aiding the war efforts. Draco Malfoy, Blaise Zabini and Pansy Parkinson were named in a citation for extraordinary efforts taken by them to aid the war.

Dumbledore had very intelligently; very, very sadly and terribly bitterly had resigned from both the Head of the Wizengamot and also as Headmaster of the Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry. The Board of Governors would meet tomorrow to discuss the resignation and also the replacement of a deceased member, Lucius Malfoy.

All the Slytherins who were at Grimmauld Place went sadly to their broken in more than one way homes, many of them as orphans and still others as Head of their Houses. They were relieved though because the Ministry had not captured their mothers and sisters whom they had not been able to take with them. The Ministry merely questioned them and if they were not guilty, had sent them home with no other questions asked.

Of course they would face more questioning later but Amelia Bones was trusting the oaths the Slytherins had given Harry and felt they would keep the other family members quiet and try to get on with their lives.

Draco before he took the sleeping potion went briefly to his Manor along with Severus, Arran and Ria and met with his hysterical mother and comforted her saying he would return soon. Snape told her that she would be questioned once again on her loyalties, but the fact that

Draco and also her sister's children were alive and would be free to live their lives was more than enough for a woman who had lived with the threat of something happening to Draco if she did not obey her husband all her life.

Draco took the portkey along with Ria and came back to Godric's Hollow to sleep off his soreness and tiredness, promising to come home later but Arran and Snape stayed with her for sometime explaining everything to her.

The Ministry was due for a huge overhaul and Amelia Bones, Brian Wheeler and Arthur were already beginning to make their presence felt. They were beginning to make sweeping changes that would make their world a better one and Arthur was already planning to make Harry's dream of uniting all the magical races together.

Harry was awoken the next morning by a cold feeling. A cold feeling of ice cold water dabbed first on one cheek and then on to the other. Harry sleepily removed his hand and mumbled and tried to swat the intrusive hand away but found his hand also immersed in ice cold water.

"Gred and Forge I am gonna kill you right now." he muttered and sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes and screamed and screamed.

"Severus, Arran, Draco, Sev please come here and save me." Harry cried and groped for his wand and his glasses and at the same time tried to back off and hit the bed post.

Lord Voldemort snorted and then huffed. Snorted? Huffed? Harry blinked and calmed down a little and looked at the Dark Lord more carefully.

Voldemort came around to Harry and removed his wand and pointed it at Harry and came closer. Harry could not help it. he screamed a bit and looked very relieved as the wand and the hand with the wand went right through him dousing him in cold water and Voldemort sniffed again.

That's right folks. Lord Voldemort sniffed.

"Happy now Harry?" he asked with a definite grievance in his voice.

"Er," was all Harry said intelligently before Snape and the others stomped into the room and then Snape who had come first shrieked and pulled out his wand and shouted, "*Avada kedavra*." But only the wall shattered because Voldemort had floated away quickly.

Lord Voldemort was now behind Harry and Snape was sweating. Suddenly everyone shouted and attacked and the next few minutes were very confusing and full of screams and 'get him he's there' and many exultant 'got him there' and 'oh no' that always followed the 'got him there'. Harry dived underneath his bed to save him self and Voldemort was doing a great job of avoiding all the curses thrown his way and Harry's room was completely destroyed.

Suddenly Voldemort joined him under the bed and Harry gasped. "Please," Voldemort whispered. "I am a ghost I cannot do harm even if I want to. Tell all the fools out there who are still cursing. What I don't know because I am here." He huffed again making Harry giggle.

"Sev stop it." Harry shouted coming out, Voldemort just behind Harry and making his back very cold and Arran was now coming stealthily and trying to attack Voldemort from the side.

"Arran wait. Wait all of you, Voldemort had become a ghost. How the hell that happened I don't know and I did not realize it initially and panicked. I am sorry for screaming but I very nearly had an attack and was so shocked and scared when I saw him first." Harry told them and then turned irritably to Voldemort, "Would you mind moving away? I am feeling numb with the cold."

"Tell them not to attack me then Harry." Voldemort told him looking superiorly at him.

Harry rolled his eyes and looked beseechingly at the others who were all poised to attack, with the wands held at alert.

"If a killing curse came at you can you be harmed?" Harry asked the ghost of Lord Voldemort.

"No of course not." the ghost replied with a smirk.

Harry gaped at the ghost and then shouted, "Hey then you get off here. I can't feel my back anymore."

Lord Voldemort looked at Harry and then turned his red eyes at the others.

"Why did you betray me?" he asked Arran quietly looking intently at him. Arran looked back calmly at him still very alert.

"Why not Voldemort? You wanted to kill muggles. Okay but why? Because you hate them? Well you can't because they are almost six billion of them in this world and we don't even come up to ten percent of that.

"I lost my parents, my grandparents, and Lucius Malfoy, and all the Inner and Outer Circle members including uncle Rabastan were killed because one boy took it into his head to attack and he also assured all of us we would get back out assets, monies everything. And you know what? All of that has already been done and we can go to living normal and respectable lives."

Voldemort shook his ghostly head sharply. "Harry would have never got into your home or the homes of the others unless you gave information about the wards."

"True but what a life I would have had Voldemort if I were still with you. I would have killed everyday fine, but after that? Once we wade through all the muggleborns and then kill all the purebloods that were opposing us and also losing a few of ours in the process even assuming we won what and whom would we have ruled. Tell me honestly and I will resurrect you now with a part of my soul."

Voldemort was silent and Snape spoke softly.

"You see Voldemort by the time this war ended, the Ministry would have fallen, the economy is already at its lowest, the purebloods would all have died and the muggleborns would be shunned and not allowed into our world and then? The ideals and the goals were not

there and so many of us like Regulus and I came to you seeking power and superiority. What we got was something different.

"We got tortured and were told to torture in turn and that gets sick after a while. We could not breathe wrongly for fear of death. Else so many of us would have advised you to look around a little and change your ways to benefit our world."

"So I lost." The ghost was looking very forlorn and then it brightened up. "But I will live for ever like this. Only I cannot perform magic or curse anyone but I will live."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Why did you come here?"

"When you were chanting that piece of ancient magic I was crying do you remember?"

Harry nodded his head looking very interested.

"In my mind I was terrified and very scared to die. You will not tell anyone else will you all?" he asked looking vulnerable for a second. All of them shook their heads their wands still on the alert.

"Well in my mind I was crying out to you, I swore on my magic that I will not harm you or Hogwarts and I will love you like your mother and father,"

"What!!??" Harry was dumbfounded.

"Well yes," the ghost replied irritably and a tad angrily, "I was going to die and I did not want to. Have you forgotten I have spent the whole of my life trying to live forever? So naturally when it came for me to die I panicked and swore all kinds of stupid things. I in short said I will be yours faithfully, always and also never ever harm Hogwarts. At that point you locked your chant and I slumped. But because I never wanted to die I did not pass over and I stayed behind. And because I swore on my magic to be good I cannot now think of doing evil, though I can make suggestions to others." Voldemort looked very sad at that. Evil had always been a part of him and it was nauseating to be so sickeningly sweet.

And Voldemort sat on Harry's bed next to him, well floated an inch above the bed actually.

Harry did not know what to say and he needed to use the bathroom very badly as well. He looked imploringly at Snape, "Sev, he is only a ghost, don't harm him, let him be and I desperately need to use the bathroom and if you do anything he will come in there."

Snape nodded reluctantly and Harry ran to the bathroom.

"You really swore?"

"In my mind, yes" Voldemort answered.

Arran, Draco, Ria and Snape looked at each other a bit uncomfortably. Hermione, Molly, Bill, Charlie and the Twins were still looking at Voldemort in shock and amazement.

Harry washed and came out looking fresh and stopped at the sight in his bedroom. All of them had their wands in their hands and were looking at him warily and in distrust. Voldemort was sneering magnificently at one and all. He was about to start laughing at the incredibly funny sight when

"Harry Potter inspires all of you doesn't he?" Voldemort asked Snape softly.

"Yes." Snape said only one word equally softly and the others nodded.

Harry felt very humble seeing and hearing that and he cleared his throat and walked in with a smile.

"What are you going to do about the Wizarding World now that you have won?" Voldemort asked him.

"How do I know you will not do stuff?" Harry asked him suspiciously.

"Stuff?" Voldemort's lips curled in disdain and he looked affronted that someone would dare speak to him like this. He glared at Harry wishing he could crucio or at least cast a blood boiling curse for speaking in such a silly manner.

"You mean I would manipulate someone into attacking you?" he sneered and Harry nodded.

Voldemort laughed and suddenly morphed into his sixteen year old self. "I cannot Harry. I really swore. That was why I was able to come here. Godric's Hollow has wards of intent doesn't it? If my intent was even slightly off I would never be able to come here because the goblins, yes I recognize their wards also, have placed wards of intent against humans, creatures, ghosts, poltergeists the works."

Snape nodded his eyes wide and put his wand inside a gesture that Harry noted with his mouth open.

"Can you sense the wards?" Snape asked him curiously.

Voldemort nodded. "Yes I will be able to, here and any other home of Harry or any other place he owns and also at Hogwarts. I pledged myself to haunt for the rest of my ghostly self only in these places."

"How come you are so malleable?" Harry asked him unable to see a sweet Voldemort. It was making him retch.

"I lost the hate and the goals when I was about to die. I realized at that time when I was facing my death that none of that was important and I wanted only to live. I swore I would be good. The oath worked because when I cried out in my mind I had my magic with me, even though it was bound tightly and I came under the oath and the moment I died I changed and became softer. Oh I am still harsh and do not like muggles, but you will not see me preaching against them because I can't. I forswore it."

Arran and Draco put their wands away and slowly the rest did too. "Remain like this always. If you get into your Voldemort form you will have a few lunatics who will want to resurrect you all over again and a few others who will want to exorcise you and save this world once again." Snape advised him with a mild sneer.

Riddle rolled his eyes and looked around and all the others went to their rooms to get swiftly changed and meet with Harry before they left for Hogwarts.

Harry went down and his parents and Sirius screamed in horror and they slowly calmed down after they were told all the details, though they kept looking at Voldemort very suspiciously.

Harry had a good meal with Voldemort asking him a great many things and Harry answered all of them as well as he could.

When he heard about the orphanage he went silent and then all the others rushed in and seeing Harry chomping away and the ghost sitting on the table and talking amicably with Harry shook their heads in amazement and went a bit more slowly to have their breakfast.

“Will you stay here today? You can speak with my parents and Sirius. I will have to go to School and maybe even the Ministry and will be late.” Harry did not want him to come with him everywhere.

Voldemort smirked knowingly and thought about it for a few minutes and nodded. Harry sighed in relief and started planning for the day.

The Daily Prophet and the Quibbler had tried to out do the other by their huge headlines and articles that took up the whole paper. There were interviews with many in the Ministry, articles, a good bit of history and pictures.

Most of the Wizarding World did not go to their homes after watching the epic duel in between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort. They had apparated to Diagon Alley and to Hogsmeade and had discussed the duel in wondrous terms and had stayed back well into the night talking about the arrests, deaths of the worst death eaters and the defeat once and for all of the most evil Lord Voldemort.

Harry and the others apparated to the School gates and met with a very solemn Dumbledore whose half moon spectacles could not conceal the bitterness in his eyes. Yesterday he had been aware of the power Harry had shown and he knew he would get no mercy from all those who knew he had bound those powers and gifts and kept Harry with the Dursleys all these years in an abusive home.

Harry had won and spectacularly. Dumbledore had resigned both as the Head of the Wizengamot and as Headmaster taking that step before he was ousted from both offices. This way at least he could hang on to a modicum of dignity.

Harry met with the Board and also with Dumbledore. Both the Minister for Magic and the Board of Hogwarts had accepted Dumbledore's resignation at once.

Harry proposed Draco Malfoy's name to the Board in the place of his father who had died. Harry assured them Draco was no death eater and he had helped spectacularly in the war efforts against Voldemort.

Draco Malfoy was stunned and he gaped at Harry. No one had known Harry would do this and by appointing Draco to his father's place Harry had given the Malfoy family one more chance at redemption.

Usually the Board would not allow a student who was still studying at Hogwarts to suggest candidates for the Board. But with the Minister's statements about the children of death eaters making special contribution and the fact that this was Harry Potter vanquisher of Voldemort and also because they wanted Harry Potter for something entirely different made them accept Draco Malfoy in place of his deceased father without much argument.

A visibly emotional Draco Malfoy looked at Harry with so much gratitude, Harry was embarrassed. Snape was so proud of Harry's gesture he felt he could burst with the pride inside him and McGonagall smiled in approval and nodded her head. Draco Malfoy stood up before the Board of Governors and pledged to work to make the School and its students worthy of the legacy the Founders' had given to the Wizarding World.

Then the oldest member stood up and cleared his throat.

"All of us Mr. Potter with the exception of Mr. Malfoy who was only now inducted into the Board have an offer for you and we pray you will accept it for the sake of the Wizarding World."

Harry frowned as he looked around everyone. Snape and McGonagall were there with him while the others were waiting in the Great Hall. Dumbledore was also sitting and he too did not seem to be aware of the offer.

"What is it? I may not accept." Harry told them bluntly.

"We wish you to take over as the next Headmaster of this School."

"WHAT??? NO." Harry shouted shocked. "I still have a year to go and I am way too young and just because I defeated Voldemort," Harry stopped there when the board member lifted his hand and stopped him. Snape and McGonagall were gaping and Draco Malfoy was totally stunned. Dumbledore looked down to hide his anger and bitterness. He was trashed and this made his defeat complete.

"Yes we know you have a year to complete but today you are the most respected figure and you will be the one the Slytherins will even think of listening to. The School will be now full of victorious Gryffindors and very defensive Slytherins. We want to defuse the situation lest it could result in the Slytherins taking the offensive and creating problems once again.

"It was this rift that we were not able to manage or bridge that caused so many problems in the past. You will have professors McGonagall and Snape and all the others to help you and the students who will obey you and make a genuine effort to unite. Please think of this before your refuse. McGonagall will still be assistant Headmistress and you will get all the help you need from all of us. The Ministry will not interfere like it did before and I along with everyone here think you can do it. Don't answer now please. Think about it Mr. Potter."

Harry was astounded and he could feel Snape's and McGonagall's shock as well. Harry nodded dumbly and then they dispersed.

Harry went to the Great Hall and Snape and McGonagall told the others who were equally stunned. Hermione though looked very thoughtful.

"You know Harry, they have a point. This time is the most difficult and will be the most turbulent. We will have the Gryffindors and the

Hufflepuffs sneering at the Slytherins and even attacking them just because they will be helpless to defend themselves. They will have the fear of being dragged to the Ministry for showing death eater traits.

“With you at the helm, it will smooth matters because all the Slytherins starting from Draco, Pansy, Blaise, Nott and the others will in this one year we have, make sure whatever the others say Harry Potter is fair and he will always listen and never shun the Slytherins. The Slytherins need that kind of an assurance for a few years until they manage to put the past behind them and reintegrate with the rest of us. We also need that many years to trust the Slytherins apart from those who have given their oaths to us. I know you don’t like it Harry, but I think you should accept.”

Snape nodded at that. “What she says is true. It would be difficult if all this would result in widening the gap between the Houses this time because of victorious Gryffindors. Think on it child.”

Harry sighed and looked at McGonagall who smiled sympathetically and also at Draco who grinned and told him to accept it very bluntly. Harry did not respond. He had been given time and he decided he would take that before deciding.

It was August 31st, one day before the Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry would open once again for the next School year as usual.

What was new was there was a new Headmaster. His name was Harry James Potter and he had the unique position of being a student and a Headmaster. Never before in the history of Hogwarts had such a thing happened.

One week after the bombshell dropped by the Board of Governors Harry had accepted the post of Headmaster and had had the wards on the School transferred to him. The wards made him feel strangely comfortable and his magic and compatibility made them ten times stronger making the thousand year old castle glow as if new.

McGonagall was still Assistant Headmistress and Snape still Potions Master. Bill Weasley resigned from Gringotts and took over as the Defense against the Dark Arts professor. The curse had been broken by the death of Voldemort and now Bill would continue in that position for a good many years.

Dumbledore retired to anonymity and spent the rest of his days brooding about where he had gone wrong. He lost his position, status and his place in the Wizarding World all in the space of three Quibbler articles. He was very bitter but dared not do a thing because of the pensieve memories hanging over his head. No one approached him and no one called him for anything. It was as if he did not exist.

Even when he went to Diagon Alley people did not even care to smile or wave at him. He had become just another wizard who was shopping. That was his worst punishment after having enjoyed being in the center of wizarding politics for over a century he was living very alone, more isolated than Harry had been with the Dursleys.

Harry had made one more trip to the Dursleys. He had the goblins with him and had removed all the wards. He was shocked to find that his aunt had not cashed the cheque he had given him. She had flushed when she had seen him and his uncle had been very silent and so had Dudley. Harry explained in a few words that since it was safe now he was bringing down the wards and he requested them to cash the cheque, telling them he had no hard feeling towards them.

They were still silent and Harry had shrugged and had disappeared away thinking he would never to meet them again. It was a year after that he came to know his aunt had cashed his cheque and he received a stilted letter from her thanking him.

Harry and his side had been very busy the three weeks before School started. Remus had woken up three days after Voldemort had fallen and was apprised of all that had happened. He was amazed at seeing the ghost and was very bitter he had missed the duel when he saw it in the pensieve.

The day Harry became the Headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and wizardry he called all those people who were in his

side for dinner, the first he would host as Headmaster. He included Narcissa Malfoy and the Slytherins who had met with him three days before School to change sides.

Harry spoke to all of them thanking them for their help and also assuring them of any help they might need in the future. He also spoke officially to the Wizing World and the press that morning. All of them had gathered there that day which was a week later and had answered all the questions. The people had started asking questions in the morning and Harry took their questions until after lunch before he ended the interviews.

A day later he was awarded the Order of Merlin first Class along with Snape for exemplary services to the Wizing World. Arran Lestrangle, Draco Malfoy and Ria Lestrangle, Pansy Parkinson and Blaise Zabini received special awards and all the other Slytherins, Hermione, Neville, Remus and Mrs. Longbottom received special citations from the Ministry.

Amelia Bones was made the Head of the Wizengamot in addition to her duties as Head of the Auror Forces and she started by declaring all magical races as equal and started the proceedings to give equal rights to everyone.

The orphanage started functioning first and it had already in the three weeks since it was started had four hundred and eighteen students, orphans, shunned muggleborns and werewolves.

Molly Weasley was the Head of the orphanage and in charge of running it and she comforted all the little ones who had been turned away by their families and gave solace to those who had lost both their parents and were orphans. She mothered them all.

The Black University was entrusted to the care of Arran Lestrangle who became the first Headmaster of what would become the most prestigious University in the Wizing World. He was also professor for Ancient Magic and became much respected and after many years of hard work and exemplary living habits and upright morals, removed the stigma that came along with his name.

The Rose Cottage School was run by Hermione Granger who became its first Headmistress. The School boasted of a library that would in a very short time rival that of Hogwarts. The Assistant headmistress was Pansy Parkinson who also took potions and taught all the students the Slytherin sarcasm.

The counseling center was a great success and Remus was in charge of it. He had portraits of his friends in his office room and together they interviewed and counseled all those who came in despair and invariably went away with a smile on their faces and the means to live a life of dignity in their hearts. Initially only the werewolves came especially for the wolfsbane but slowly the vampires, even house elves and other dark creatures would come in with hope in their hearts and they were never disappointed.

The Wizarding World thrived and bloomed once again and those that were blessed to be in the center of it were determined never to allow the dark days they had faced for their children. They worked hard and tried their best to make their world a better place to live.

Voldemort took the position of Harry's secretary without being asked and he gave some useful and some silly advice on all issues. He still felt and said very vocally and very loudly that nothing worked like a crucio and if Harry would want to be successful then he would do well to try it. Apart from such suggestions he did give a lot of valuable advice and stayed in Hogwarts asserting his superiority over the other ghosts and taking the position of being the only one to control Peeves from the Bloody Baron.

Voldemort especially terrorized Ron and Ginny that year and gave them all kinds of nightmares by talking as floated beside them of the good old days of killing, raping and the inventive methods of torture. He gave them such horrifying descriptions they were terrified.

While Harry had his own rooms as Headmaster, Hermione Granger still stayed in her dorms. She was Head Girl along with Draco Malfoy who was Head Boy, and she never even looked at them. That started speculations running about the breaking of the Golden Trio because Ron had no citations or special awards unlike so many others. He

and Ginny spent miserably their time in Hogwarts, alone and unfriendly. Still they never tried to apologize to Harry or to Hermione. They did not have the nerve.

Ron and Ginny moved from their parents home to stay with Percy after the defeat of Voldemort. Neither of his parents objected. Ron after he finished School pooled his money along with Ginny and started a second hand shop that bought all used stuff and then resold them. They made enough money to get by.

After some years Ron, Ginny and Percy picked up the courage to visit their parents and after some more years they were invited every year for dinner on the day before Samhain.

Ron married a witch when he was thirty and Ginny married Ron's wife's brother and slowly they settled down to a life of normalcy. Percy continued in the Ministry and slowly grew up to hold the position of Head Monitor of the Ministry Floo. He accepted his life and settled down marrying Penelope Clearwater who loved him and agreed to marry him.

The Twins were married too to muggle twins who shared their love of jokes and pranks and fell in love with the Wizarding World. They produced two sets of twins each before they realized what a terror they had been to their parents and family.

Bill married Fleur and Charlie married Elrida a girl he had met in Romania. The Weasleys wizarding wheezes were doing very well and the Twins became very rich over the years.

Arthur and Molly Weasley still lived at The Burrow and they now delighted in their grandchildren and also in being with all the kids at the orphanage.

All muggleborn children and all those who lived in the Wizarding World sent their children to Rose Cottage and there without the House rivalries the children formed friendships that continued well after they entered Hogwarts and were sorted into different Houses. Now there was a healthy rivalry instead of the outright hate that was present before.

The Wizarding World passed the vote in favor of keeping their world secret and all muggleborn parents were spelled to keep silent about the Wizarding World.

Dudley Dursley married a muggle girl who loved boxing and him in that order and they had six children all of them magical. The moment Harry read in the books about a magical child being born to the Dursleys he apparated to their home and demanded for the baby girl. Even if it was Dudley's child Harry had decided he would not let it take his place in the cupboard under the stairs.

The Dursleys were horrified to know that the baby was magical and more than willing to give the baby away but Joanna Dursley punched her mother and father in law on their faces and broke their noses and made them nasal for the rest of their lives. She threatened to leave Dudley if her child was taken away from her and since Dudley actually loved her and very much feared her he agreed to keep the baby girl.

Petunia and Vernon Dursley were asked to stay away from their family forever by their daughter in law who then demanded a bemused and shocked Harry for proof of magic. Fearing for his nose Harry removed his wand and conjured many things for her.

She screamed in delight when Harry assured her that her daughter would also be able to do all this and vowed then and there that she would have as many kids as she could and pray they would all be magical and scared the pants of the other horrified Dursleys who felt they were being punished by the fates for treating Harry badly.

She called it a boon and said her daughter was precious and screeched at her in laws and called her mother in law a jealous horse and her father in law a fat baboon for not understanding. They kept quiet because they were very scared of breaking other body parts.

She then asked Harry why he had thought it necessary to take her lovely baby away and when Harry very naughtily told her he did not want his niece to live in the cupboard under the stairs and be their servant as he had been, she turned to the trembling Dursleys growing

many inches in her righteous anger and faced the now ashen horse and baboon and shook her fist at them and then screamed at them to get out. She turned to Dudley and he shook with fear but she did not do a thing to him because she needed him after all to keep producing magical babies.

Harry laughed for years afterwards remembering that scene. Lily was the name of her baby daughter. Joanna had named her daughter Lily just to spite Petunia and sent her to the Rose Cottage School when she was older. She had auburn hair like Harry's mother and beautiful green eyes and Joanna had made Harry Lily's Godfather. The Dursleys did not say a word. They didn't quite dare.

Draco Malfoy married Ria and was very happy. They had six children and all of them very, very loved. Narcissa lived for them and doted on them and poured all the love she had been unable to give Draco to her grandchildren. Two years after Voldemort she joined the orphanage and worked there ever after caring for all the kids who had no love shown to them.

Blaise and Pansy became a couple and married much later. They had one son and were very contented.

Snape to everyone's surprise married Emmeline Vance and had three children, two daughters and a son all them mercifully not inheriting his hooked nose. Snape loved his children but Harry was special. He had been Snape's hope and even today the bond he shared with Harry was something very special.

Remus married Tonks when she threatened to castrate him if he did not and they had one son who was a metamorphagus and not a werewolf. Remus was teased mercilessly by James and Sirius but since he was so used to their teasing he did not react much except that he was permanently blushing for a very long time.

Arran Lestrangle married Luna Lovegood after a few years with her father's blessing and he always showed immense interest in all the Wackspurts and Gnarrs. They were very happy and had two children

a boy and a girl. Arran named his son Regulus and his daughter after Luna's mother Emily.

Harry asked Hermione out in his seventh year and they dated very content and very much in love with each other. They bonded when Harry was twenty years old. They had six children four boys and two girls and his eldest child was called Sirius James. They were very much loved by both their parents and their grandparents and Sirius and Snape and Arran and well you get the picture. They were loved by everyone.

Harry made Snape Godfather to Sirius and Snape scowled at having to call Sirius by name because he simply could not call his godson Potter. He begged and pleaded and threatened and hexed Harry to change the name of his child but Harry was adamant and told him quite unsympathetically that it was punishment for having 'Slytherin rules' to activate their earring.

Snape was dumbfounded at that and marveled at the length to which a Potter would go to enact revenge. It was Slytherin he told Harry admiringly hoping Harry would change his mind but Harry unfortunately did not take the bait and looked the other way.

McGonagall was very contented with her many Godchildren. Harry, Arran, Draco and Snape had asked her to be Godmother for one of their children and she had agreed very happily. Now she spent her holidays spoiling all of them.

To all these families Voldemort was the family ghost with each child treating the Dark Lord without any respect whatsoever as only a child could. Voldemort was resigned to his fate; after all if you wanted to live forever you had to make compensations had you not?

They were very happy, all of them.

May it continue forever

End of Chapter – 36

COMPLETE